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The Cats And Clans

Lauren Schmeltzer

A/N: I have finished editing all of this book!!! I may return and add more to it in a month or so, but until then you will have to read book two: "Apprentices to Warriors, Peace to Bloodshed". look for it on my profile page. I will edit that one next and start uploading more chapters soon! May StarClan light your path, young warriors!

The Clans

Thunderclan

Leader: Oakstar, Brown tom cat with green eyes.

Deputy: Wolfheart, Silver tabby she-cat with gray stripes and amber eyes.

Medicine Cat: Flamefur, Orange tom with amber eyes.

Apprentice: Frostfang, white tom with green eyes.

Warriors:

Badgerface, black she-cat with a long white stripe on her spine and head with blue eyes.

Apprentice: Wingpaw

Volewhisker, silver she-cat with green eyes.

Fogheart, moody orange tom with green eyes.

Apprentice: Softpaw

Cheetahleg, lean white she-cat with black spots and blue eyes.

Apprentice: Whiskerpaw

Lightningfur, bluish-gray tom with amber eyes.

Cowpelt, black and white she-cat with green eyes.

Apprentice: Gingerpaw

Sunshine, light orange tom with yellow eyes.

Apprentice: Critterpaw

Brokenheart, gloomy gray tom with amber eyes.

Tigerscar, silver tom with blue eyes. Renamed after nearly being killed as an apprentice and has eleven long scars down his neck and sides.

Apprentice: Swiftpaw

Twolegheart, brown tabby tom with blue eyes. Was found at the abandoned twoleg nest as a very young kit.

Daisyfur, orange she-cat with amber eyes.

Apprentice: Icepaw

Queens:

Treeleg, very tall brown she-cat with green eyes. Expecting kits

Runningbear, brown she-cat with amber eyes. **Kits:** Rootkit, Holekit, and Harekit.

Kickingbird, silver tabby she-cat with one amber eye and one blue eye. **Kits:** Moonkit, Cloudkit, Shadekit, Mudkit, and Piranhakit

Apprentices:

Swiftpaw, black she-cat with green eyes.

Wingpaw, small brown tom with blue eyes.

Gingerpaw, white tabby she-cat with faint brown stripes and blue eyes.

Icepaw, white she-cat with amber eyes.

Softpaw, bluish-gray tom with blue eyes.

Whiskerpaw, silver tom with yellow eyes.

Critterpaw, small mostly-gray tortoiseshell she-cat with blue eyes.

Kits:

Rootkit, light brown tabby tom with darker brown stripes and amber eyes.

Holekit, dark brown she-cat with a ginger circle around one of her green eyes.

Harekit, brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes.

Moonkit, black and silver tom with blue eyes.

Cloudkit, silvery she-cat with blue eyes.

Shadekit, black tom with blue eyes.

Mudkit, really dark gray tom with green eyes.

Piranhakit, sharp-toothed gray tom with blue eyes.

Elders:

Rockstripe, blind gray tom with yellow eyes.

Shadowclan

Leader: Eaglestar, large black and dark gray tom with very long fur and a gray head and blue eyes.

Deputy: Glareheart, gray tom with amber eyes.

Medicine Cat: Loyalheart, extremely protective black she-cat with amber eyes.

Warriors:

Powerfur, huge black and white tom with green eyes.

Lightningwhisker, brown she-cat with crooked whiskers and amber eyes.

Apprentice: Silverpaw

Ashmist, gray tom with blue eyes.

Apprentice: Sheeppaw

Mistfoot, white she-cat with gray paws and blue eyes.

Darkpelt, silver tom with blue eyes.

Apprentice: Twilightpaw

Dangerstripe, black she-cat with yellow eyes.

Antfur, brown and white tom with green eyes.

Flyheart, black she-cat with blue eyes.

Apprentice: Mousepaw

Deereyes, ginger tom with amber eyes.

Falconwing, brown she-cat with amber eyes.

Apprentice: Airpaw

Queens:

Restfur, brown she-cat with yellow eyes. Expecting kits.

Eagerfoot, black she-cat with green eyes. **Kits:** Breezekit, and Duskkit

Apprentices:

Airpaw, white tom with green eyes.

Sheeppaw, fluffy white she-cat with amber eyes.

Silverpaw, silver tom with green eyes.

Twilightpaw, dark gray tom with blue eyes.

Mousepaw, brown she-cat with green eyes.

Kits:

Breezekit, black she-cat with blue eyes.

Duskkit, black and brown tom with green eyes.

Elders:

Wishwing, fluffy gray she-cat with blue eyes.

Rabbitleg, brown tom with green eyes.

Dograce, black white and brown tom with blue eyes.

Windclan

Leader: Grassstar, brown and gray she-cat with blue eyes and coarse fur.

Deputy: Streamcloud, silver she-cat with green eyes.

Medicine Cat: Earthpelt, light brown tabby tom with green eyes.

Apprentice: Sandpaw, grey and brown tom with amber eyes.

Warriors:

Oceanscream, gray she-cat with amber eyes.

Apprentice: Beechpaw

Treestripe, gray tom with brown stripes and yellow eyes.

Boldcloud, silver tom with amber eyes.

Apprentice: Beachpaw

Thornfang, black and brown she-cat with green eyes.

Scarcloud, reddish-brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes.

Horsetail, brown tom with green eyes.

Bushfrost, ginger she-cat with yellow eyes.

Apprentice: Digspaw

Hiddenleaf, brown she-cat with black spots and blue eyes.

Dewmist, silver she-cat with blue eyes.

Snowdrift, white she-cat with green eyes.

Queens:

Burnedleaf, black she-cat with blue eyes. kits: Buffetkit

Apprentices:

Digspaw, brown tom with huge paws and amber eyes.

Beechpaw, dark brown tom with blue eyes.

Beachpaw, ginger she-cat with blue eyes

Kits:

Buffetkit, black tom with green eyes and long, scruffy fur.

Elders:

Mournheart, light brown she-cat with green eyes, parents and littermates died in a dog attack just before she was apprenticed.

Swanwing, silver tom with blue eyes.

Riverclan

Leader: Snowstar, pure white she-cat with amber eyes.

Deputy: Screamtuft, long-haired silver tom with amber eyes.

Medicine Cat: Sunset, orange tom with amber eyes.

Warriors:

Lakewind, bluish-silver she-cat with green eyes.

Streamfur, silver she-cat with blue eyes.

Apprentice: Cornpaw

Bloodwing, orange tom with amber eyes.

Apprentice: Leafpaw

Tornwhisker, black she-cat with amber eyes.

Damagepelt, heavily scarred black tom with yellow eyes.

Ironfur, silver tom with blue eyes.

Goldkill, yellowish tom with green eyes.

Apprentice: Cherrypaw

Stripeclaw, brown tabby she-cat with black stripes.

Fullfur, brown thick-furred tom with blue eyes.

Leopardwing, dappled silver tom with amber eyes.

Apprentice: Russetpaw

Apprentices:

Cornpaw, yellow tom with amber eyes.

Cherrypaw, orange she-cat with green eyes.

Leafpaw, brown tom with green eyes.

Russetpaw, silver tom with amber eyes.

Elders:

Loneskies, silver she-cat with amber eyes.

Chapter One

Chapter 1

~

Moonkit stretched his silver muzzle wide in a yawn before looking around at his surroundings. All of the other kits and their mothers were still fast asleep. The mischievous kit snuck out of the nursery as quietly as he could on his little paws. As soon as he made it out he raced away excitedly, thinking he was the only one awake. His tail drooped when he saw a group of warriors walking through the camp. Then he noticed that they were all around the deputy, waiting to be chosen to go on a patrol. The black-and-silver tabby kit sped toward the group, eagerness gleaming in his blue eyes.

“Can I go on a patrol Wolfheart!?” Moonkit begged the gray she-cat.

The deputy paused what she was doing to gaze down at him affectionately, “Sorry Moonkit, but you still have a moon to wait before you are an apprentice, and kits can’t leave without their mothers.”

Moonkit instantly hung his head in disappointment and began dragging his paws-made heavy by his sadness-through the dirt on his way back to the nursery. Then he heard the medicine cat apprentice calling to him.

“Hey, Moonkit!”

Moonkit instantly perked up and answered happily, “What is it Frostfang? Do you need help collecting herbs?”

“Actually,” the white tom began as he padded closer, “I wanted to know why you were out of the nursery so early. It’s barely dawn!” Before the kit could reply the older cat asked, “Do you want to learn a battle move?”

Moonkit’s jaw dropped as he said, “Really? But none of the other kits have been trained!”

“So you’ll be the first,” Frostfang agreed.

“So what do I do?” Moonkit asked the medicine cat, not hesitating for a moment as he went down into his best crouch.

Frostfang lowered himself as well before answering, “Try to attack my tummy.”

The eager kit wiggled his hindquarters as he prepared to spring at the medicine cat. He leaped directly at Frostfang’s exposed stomach, but he easily dodged and at the last second, Moonkit realized Frostfang had grabbed him by the scruff of his neck. They began to spin and Moonkit found himself giggling uncontrollably as the world whipped past too fast for the little kit to keep up. He soon noticed that he was on the ground again, though everything around him continued to circle.

“The Windclan warrior got me,” Moonkit said jokingly as he went limp.

“Grr,” Frostfang said as he, too, began laughing.

“Frostfang!” The medicine cat, Flamefur, called to his apprentice.

Frostfang began moving but yelled over his shoulder, “Sorry, see you later Moonkit!”

Moonkit smiled back. He was disappointed to see the cat go after the fun they’d had, but he was content for the time being. The kit started walking towards the nursery, when he saw his littermates; Cloudkit, Shadekit, Mudkit, and Piranhakit, stream from the bramble den that he was headed. They began to race each other to the fresh-kill pile, but Moonkit was determined to win, even if he

hadn't been there for the start of the race. With a flying leap, he knocked a large blackbird off the top and both he and the bird toppled onto the four other kits. Feathers flew in all directions as they wrestled each other for it.

"Kits!" Kickingbird, their mother, roared from the entrance to the nursery.

Immediately the kits stopped what they were doing and looked at the ground in shame. The queen walked over to them with a disapproving stare holding them in place. She took one look at the bird, shredded to bits by the kits' play, and her gaze hardened.

"All of you, find the juiciest piece of prey for Rockstripe, and when you come back this bird is yours. You won't get another thing to eat until the bones are licked clean."

Even though Moonkit and his littermates loved visiting the elder and hearing the fun stories he had to tell, he knew it was a good punishment. At one glance at the bird, he instantly lost his appetite and his whiskers twitched in disgust. He and his siblings moved to do as she ordered.

As they went, she yowled to them, "If Rockstripe doesn't say that it's the best he's eaten in his life, I'll make sure you don't become apprentices for five moons!"

Immediately the kits hared away, back to the fresh-kill pile. They decided on a plump mouse and carefully carried it over to the elder's den. Though Moonkit's mouth watered as he carried the delicious mouse, he dared not take even the smallest bite. When they arrived, the old tom's gray ears pricked. After recognizing who had come, he flicked his tail for them to enter and slowly pulled himself up. They dropped the mouse in front of the elder, who sniffed it curiously.

"That's the most delicious mouse I've ever tasted!" Rockstripe announced as he took a bite. Based on the humorous gleam in his eyes, Moonkit figured he had heard their mother yelling to them.

“Fresh off the pile!” Mudkit announced proudly, purring the entire time.

“You didn’t even help carry it!” Piranhakit hissed jokingly, cuffing his ear playfully.

“Thank you kits,” Rockstripe purred, ignoring their play. “When I’m done eating, would you like to hear a story about how Tigerclan earned their stripes?”

“But we’ve heard that one a million times!” Cloudkit complained loudly.

Rockstripe lifted his head in surprise. “Then I’ll just have to tell you of the time when the mighty Firestar came to Thunderclan!” The kits lit up with excitement at the name of the best leader in their clan’s history.

“I suppose I can start now,” Rockstripe chuckled warmly at their enthusiasm. “It all started in the old forest, past the mountains, over thunderpaths, and around twolegplaces. A young apprentice, by the name of Graypaw, went off hunting near a twoleg nest alone. And suddenly, the starling he was stalking flew up into the trees.”

Moonkit’s ears twitched with excitement.

“He heard a rustling coming from the bushes, so he looked through them and saw an orange kittypet with his paw tangled up in a bramble. Just as the kittypet got free, Graypaw leaped at him and pinned him down. ‘What are you doing in my territory!?’ He growled to the kittypet. And then-"

“Kits!”

Moonkit looked out of the den to find out what was so important that she had to interrupt the story. Shadekit and Cloudkit stood to leave, and Moonkit reluctantly followed, but they were stopped by the elder for a moment longer.

“Did you know that Firestar’s my kin?” Rockstripe asked with a purr.

Moonkit's jaw dropped in amazement and he gazed at the elder in awe, imagining he saw the golden warrior hidden in his dark gray fur. He couldn't believe it! And that meant Sunshine and Daisyfur were related to Firestar as well, being his kits and everything. Hearing his mother call again, Moonkit realized that he was the last one in the den with Rockstripe. He dipped his head respectfully to the elder, surprising even himself, before pelting into the clearing.

The black-and-silver kit followed Kickingbird and his littermates back into the nursery, though he slowed to get a good final look at the clearing before vanishing into the brambles. Treeleg and Runningbear were still fast asleep, and Runningbear's kits curled up close to their mother in their own deep sleep. Moonkit let out a large yawn before snuggling close to his littermates and falling asleep.

~

Moonkit woke up suddenly to Mudkit prodding his stomach with an eager paw. His excited movements told Moonkit that whatever he was waking him up for, it was going to be good. The kit stretched for a moment and followed his brother out of the nursery.

"What did you have to wake me up for?" Moonkit asked moodily.

Mudkit ignored his question and bounded away into the clearing, giving Moonkit no choice but to follow. It was the fourth sunrise since he and his siblings had visited Rockstripe and found out about his relation to Firestar. They entered the elders' den again, and Moonkit sighed when he heard Rockstripe telling all of the kits and apprentices. He was awed by the fact, but Moonkit had already heard about it and desperately wanted his sleep.

He rolled his eyes and left the den again, heading back to the nursery with his tail dragging wearily through the dust. He flopped into the nest he shared with his family, but he was alone for once. He was just falling asleep when a scream tore at his eardrums from right next to him. It was Treeleg.

“Treeleg! What’s wrong!?” Moonkit gasped in surprise.

“My kits are coming!” Treeleg yowled in fear, not even realizing who had asked. It was her first litter, Moonkit knew, and she seemed pretty scared.

“I’ll go get Flamefur!” Moonkit yelped and tore out of the nursery again.

There weren’t any cats close enough to be able to here the queen’s cries, so Moonkit ran as fast as his legs could carry him to the medicine cat’s den. He slid to a stop in front of the medicine cat and his apprentice, but he had to take a second to get his breath under control.

“Moonkit, what’s wrong?” Frostfang asked, more out of curiosity than alarm.

Finally he managed to gasp, “Treeleg’s…having…kits!”

“I’m on it!” Flamefur announced, the seriousness plain on his face as he raced away to get some herbs.

Before Moonkit had fully recovered, the orange tom was already padding quickly to the nursery, though he was careful not to spill or damage the leaves and berries he carried in his jaws. His apprentice came quickly after, carrying a poppy flower in his mouth for the seeds, just in case. The kit followed more slowly, making sure he didn’t get in their way or run out of breath again.

Moonkit peered into the nursery to see Treeleg, and the panic clearly visible all over her face. He was shouldered aside by his mother and Runningbear as they appeared seemingly out of nowhere. The nursery was then far too full for Moonkit to see inside, but he could clearly hear all four of the cats trying to calm the queen.

The kit began pouting, wanting to see inside to find out what was happening as Flamefur announced, “Two toms and a she-cat, you can rest now Treeleg.”

Moonkit finally managed to shove his way inside after

the medicine cat and his apprentice left. He felt a small smile tugging at his lips when he saw three tiny brown kits squirming all around their mother, squealing all the while. Treeleg was just licking up two poppy seeds that Frostfang had given her, and she finally looked calm again.

Twolegheart, the kits' father, shoved his way into the nursery. His disappointment at missing the birth of his kits was instantly replaced by the joy of seeing the little creatures wiggling around, mewling weak little cries.

"What will you name them?" Moonkit asked, temporarily breaking the tender family moment.

Treeleg looked deep in thought for a moment before answering, "The darker tom will be Meadowkit, the other tom Warmkit…."

"And the she-kit can be Bloomkit?" Twolegheart asked his mate.

"Perfect," she answered with a purr.

Moonkit's mother led him out of the nursery, telling the queen, "We'll leave you be."

The black-and-silver kit was very reluctant, but didn't dare to disobey his mother. He slowly padded after her, wondering who the next queen would be. He couldn't wait until the newborn kits were old enough to play! But, with any luck, he would be an apprentice by then. The thought warmed him deeply.

~

Moonkit leaped into the air and caught a moss ball that Shadekit had flicked at him. He picked it up in his teeth and flung it at Cloudkit, who swatted it to the ground and kicked it softly to Bloomkit. She and her littermates were three weeks older, and the two litters of kits were playing their game eagerly. Moonkit, Shadekit, Cloudkit, and Meadowkit were trying to keep the moss ball away from the other kits, though Piranhakit was uninterested

and just watched from the nursery.

Bloomkit snatched the piece of moss in her jaws and raced away with it. Her longer-legged brother, Meadowkit, easily caught up to her and jumped directly on top of a little brown spot on her back and pinned her down. He hit the moss ball away and both kits with their other brother Warmkit raced after it.

"Kits!" Kickingbird called from the nursery before carefully easing her way out beside Piranhakit. Once all five of her kits had gathered she said, "Oakstar and I were talking and he said that it's time for you to be apprentices! Come here so I can groom your fur."

Mudkit and Shadekit, the most arrogant of Moonkit's littermates, he noticed, were the first to reach their mother for grooming. Cloudkit wriggled in discomfort as their mother groomed her fluffy silver fur. Piranhakit was next, hardly even noticing Kickingbird's rough tongue over his head as his eyes were filled with excitement. Moonkit was last, and he could feel that his mother was growing weary of the near-impossible task of grooming five kits. His fur that had been rising in sheer joy was pressed flat again. Just as she finished, Moonkit saw Oakstar walk out onto Highledge.

"Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath Highledge for a clan meeting!"

Immediately cats left their dens, elders, the medicine cats, warriors, and apprentices, all gathered beneath their leader, though it was apparent that they had no idea what was going on. A few turned their heads and upon seeing the freshly-groomed kits, figured out what was happening. Moonkit wondered which one of the many cats would be his mentor. The newest warrior, Swiftwind, looked at all of the kits affectionately, making the kit think she was going to mentor one of them.

"Cats of ThunderClan, the time has come for five kits to become apprentices," Oakstar began with a proud gleam in his eyes. "Mudkit, from this moment on until you receive your warrior name, you will be called Mudpaw, and your mentor will be Swiftwind.

Swiftwind, you have just completed your training and you seem more than ready to take on an apprentice of your own. Tigerscar taught you to be brave and caring, and I hope you can pass on all you have learned to your apprentice."

Mudpaw padded proudly up to his new mentor and touched noses with her, before they both made their way to the back of the crowd and sat to watch the rest of the ceremony.

"Cloudkit, you have reached the age of six moons and it is time for you to be apprenticed. From this day on, until you receive your warrior name, you will be known as Cloudpaw. Your mentor will be Lightningfur, and I hope he passes everything he knows on to you."

The two touched noses before joining the other mentor and apprentice.

Oakstar pause for a moment before continuing, "Piranhakit, you also have reached six moons. From this day on until you are a warrior, we shall call you Piranhapaw. Volewhisker, you have taught many apprentices, and I hope you can continue to use your experience and skill to raise this apprentice into a fine warrior."

The silver she-cat strode forward elegantly and gently touched noses with Moonkit's brother before they retreated to the back of the group together.

"Brokenheart, Rockstripe was an excellent mentor to you and your time to have an apprentice is long overdue. You have shown yourself to be patient, fearless, and a strong warrior, and we all hope that you can pass these noble traits onto Shadepaw."

Moonkit was severely disappointed to see the two stumble forward to touch noses. He would have loved to have such a mighty warrior as his mentor. Looking around the crowd, he noticed that there weren't many options left as mentors, unless his mentor was his mother. Runningbear had been given one of her kits to train.

“Finally, Moonkit. You have reached the proper age and it is time for you to have a mentor. You will now be called Moonpaw, and your mentor will be Wolfheart. She has proven to be a loyal and strong warrior, and I hope she can turn you into one as well.”

Moonkit’s eyes flew wide open in surprise at being apprenticed to the leader. He made his way toward the silver she-cat at the front of the crowd with his tail raised high. He reached up and touched his nose to hers, holding on to the proud moment as long as he could until he felt her pull away from him. He waited for her to lead the way to the back, but she never did. Moonpaw looked around and sat happily next to her.

“Mudpaw! Cloudpaw! Piranhapaw! Shadepaw! Moonpaw!” Moonpaw’s heart felt like it would burst from his chest, his worries about having a good mentor all but obliterated as every cat cheered.

“It’s about time we got through them all!” Twolegheart joked from somewhere off in the crowd, and *mrrows* of laughter followed.

Oakstar dipped his head in acknowledgement before finishing, “Thank StarClan for so many healthy apprentices and warriors, you are all dismissed.”

Moonpaw looked up at the setting sun just before his new mentor said, “Go enjoy your first night in your new den. At dawn we will go on border patrol with Shadepaw, Brokenheart, and Wingpaw.”

The apprentice dipped his head respectfully to Wolfheart, still too pleased to speak, before racing over to the apprentices’ den. All of the other apprentices were there, but Mudpaw and Piranhapaw were blocking the entrance. Moonpaw rolled his eyes and squeezed between them. Just as he was directly between them, he felt his nose brush something. He opened his eyes again to see Shadepaw directly in front of him.

“Let me out!” Moonpaw heard Icepaw wail from

somewhere inside.

"I'm stuck too!" Softpaw yowled as the bodies inside began squirming about.

Shadepaw grunted with effort before crashing into his brothers as he clambered out. All of the other apprentices wiggled their way out. The last one to leave, Gingerpaw, was gasping for breath as she hobbled out.

Wingpaw asked, "Cloudpaw, Critterpaw, Whiskerpaw, and Softpaw, can you go get your mentors and ask if they can help make the den bigger. Gingerpaw, Icepaw, come with me to get more moss for bedding. The rest can stay here and help when we come back."

Moonpaw nodded as everyone except he and his littermates raced off to different parts of the clearing. In just a few moments, there were several warriors and even Oakstar who helped to expand the den. Just as they were finishing up, Wingpaw and his group of moss collectors returned and entered. Without a word the warriors retreaded back to the warriors' den for a good night's sleep.

"You can come in now," Wingpaw told the five newest apprentices before he yawned.

The nine older apprentices were huddled together in the center of the den while Moonpaw and his littermates found beds of moss around them and curled up. *What a funny day,* Moonpaw thought to himself as he let himself purr for a few moments. Immediately after his purring stopped, he fell asleep.

Chapter Two

Chapter 2

~

Moonpaw dreamed of being in a battle. Looking around, he saw every one of his clan mates fighting against cats he had never met before, probably from another clan. He saw a massive black tom with ridiculously long, sleek fur and a massive light gray head. His blue eyes locked on the new apprentice and he hissed loudly before charging towards him.

“The warrior code will be broken,” all of the cats vanished Moonpaw spun around as he tried to locate the source of the voices that surrounded him, “the forest will turn crimson with the blood of betrayal, and cats will decide where their loyalties truly lie.”

Where each individual cat had been fighting before there were now just small pools of blood, most overlapping with other to form pools of the sticky liquid as it flowed over Moonpaw’s paws, staining them red. The tom that was about to attack Moonpaw before walked through the blood as if it were nothing more than water.

As he passed each pool, it turned back into a warrior. Moonpaw’s siblings rose from the pools and followed the blood-soaked cat as more warriors rose and began racing after him. Before they disappeared into the trees, Moonpaw could hear them yowling in blood-thirsty madness, splashing through the crimson puddles with crazed looks in their eyes.

“Beware the eagle of fire!” The voices said and repeated several times before the dream faded to blackness.

Moonpaw moaned when he opened his eyes and a tiny ray of sunshine pierced through his eyelids. He rolled a bit to the side before opening his eyes and stretching his eager limbs. He yawned

and bounced happily out of the den. Once outside he took a deep breath, inhaling the ThunderClan scent deep through his nostrils. The memory of his dream came to him and he shivered, but he thought nothing of it as he padded away.

At the center of the camp Wolfheart, his mentor, was sending patrols out left and right. Moonpaw made his way to the edge as Shadepaw, Cloudpaw, and their new mentors left to start training for hunting. Some way off Moonpaw heard Piranhapaw's mentor telling him to stay inside the camp for the day to care for the elders and queens and change the bedding in the warriors' den. Horrible as it was, at least he could say he was the first one of their litter in the warriors' den.

"Moonpaw, I'm glad you're up," Wolfheart purred after she told the rest of the cats around her to choose their own hunting patrols. "Most apprentices don't wake up until sun-high on their first day."

"I was just too excited!" Moonpaw half lied. He had indeed been very excited, but that wouldn't have woken him.

Wolfheart meowed, "Well good. Your first test is; can you smell your brother and his mentor?"

"Inside the camp?"

"We aren't exactly leaving without them," Wolfheart replied.

Not wanting to question his mentor any further, Moonpaw opened his mouth to detect any trace he could of the two cats. He smelled the strong herb-filled scent of Flamefur the medicine cat, the comforting milky scents of the nursery, and the relatively old scents of his other siblings. Inhaling as deeply as he could, he could detect the faintest trace of Shadepaw and Brokenheart.

"Over there!"Moonpaw meowed as he flicked his tail towards a bush at the side of the camp that the two were resting under.

Wolfheart purred before saying, “Brokenheart, you and Shadepaw are coming with me and Moonpaw on patrol.” The deputy looked around for a moment before shouting, “Wingpaw, you’re coming with us!”

The three cats padded over to join Moonpaw and his mentor, dipping their heads respectfully to Wolfheart. She flicked her tail, signaling for them to follow before she led the way through the thorn barrier. It was Moonpaw’s first time outside the camp and he gasped in surprise when the forest scents rushed in on him.

“You alright?” Wolfheart asked with a tint of humor in her voice.

Moonpaw gazed around for a moment as they continued walking before he replied, “Yes, this is amazing.”

After a few moments of silence, Brokenheart asked, “Do you mind me asking where we’re going, and how far for that matter?”

“We’re headed straight towards one territory, but I want to see if Moonpaw or Mudpaw can guess it before we get there. If we make good time we might be able to go all the way around,” Wolfheart replied, picking up the pace as she did so.

Moonpaw and Mudpaw struggled to keep up, leaping over fallen branches and thrusting their way through ferns and bushes clumsily. Mudpaw did his best to conceal his struggle, but every once in a while he would fall behind or his paw would slip on a patch of mud or he would trip over a root. Moonpaw, however, was beginning to think that the only things his own paws came in contact with were things that would trip him. When they finally stopped, both of the younger apprentices were gasping for breath, though even Wingpaw looked a little tired from the run.

“Moonpaw, Mudpaw, what territory do you think this is a border of?”

Both apprentices raised their mouths to the sky and breathed deeply, trying to catch the scent. Immediately they

clamped their jaws shut and gagged. When Moonpaw recovered, he saw surprise on his mentors face.

"ShadowClan!" Mudpaw gasped as his face scrunched up at the smell. "They smell like crowfood!"

"Crowfood smells way worse than ShadowClan," Brokenheart explained, though he didn't seem to be paying much attention. He and Wolfheart were both sniffing the air.

"Their smell shouldn't be this strong from here," Wolfheart meowed in confusion as she crept forward a few paces.

A yowl rang in the air just before a large gray tom leaped at the deputy. They hissed and snarled at each other as they wrestled each other. Moonpaw was about to leap to his mentor's aid when he felt something crash into him. He felt himself get pinned to the forest floor by a dark gray paw. He looked up at the tom that had him pinned and hissed as he struggled to get free, but the cat's paw was holding him tight.

With a yowl of rage Moonpaw thrust his right hind leg into the apprentice's stomach, sending him backwards in pain. The ThunderClan apprentice didn't hesitate, and unsheathed his claws before swinging at the gray tom. The cat tried to retreat from the blow, but that allowed Moonpaw to scratch his flank instead.

Moonpaw hissed again and leaped on top of the cat's shoulders. He dug his claws in tight and bit down hard on his ear. The apprentice rolled over and dislodged Moonpaw, but he was back on his feet in a moment. The gray tom lunged, scratching Moonpaw's cheek. The black-and-silver cat yowled in rage before scratching blindly at his enemy. He got himself scratched once more on his head, but the other apprentice limped back to ShadowClan territory with six scratches on his pelt, a bleeding ear, a bleeding forepaw, and a very deep scratch from his back to his hind leg.

Moonpaw looked around and saw a brown she-cat and a white apprentice tom fighting Wingpaw, a massive black-and-white tom fighting Brokenheart, and a black she-cat and black-and-brown tom, both apprentices, fighting Mudpaw. The ThunderClan cats

were outnumbered, but Moonpaw didn't know what else to do.

With a yowl of frustration, Moonpaw leaped at the black-and-brown tom, bowling him over. He pinned the cat down and scratched deep at his belly once before the apprentice got the message and raced away. Moonpaw looked again and saw that Mudpaw and Wingpaw were fighting three ShadowClan cats well enough together. Since his mentor was nowhere in sight, he leaped at the giant warrior fighting Brokenheart.

Instantly Moonpaw realized that this cat wouldn't be as easy to scare off as the apprentices. He was a full-fledged senior warrior with rippling muscles and an advanced knowledge and experience in battle. The apprentice scratched his hind leg weekly and the tom turned on him in an instant, pinning him down and slashing at his flank once. Moonpaw struggled, but the cat was too strong.

"Don't you touch him!" Brokenheart roared as he attacked the black-and-white tom again.

The two cats rolled around each other, hissing and spitting in fury as they did. Moonpaw tried to attack the tom again, sneaking under him and scratching his soft underbelly before retreating. He stopped and turned back to watch what happened and regretted it instantly. The enemy cat slashed his claws right between Moonpaw's ears and his other paw tore at his flank. Moonpaw hissed and dove onto the cats back. He knew he had a limited window of opportunity.

He used three paws at once to rake at the cats back while his teeth clung on his left shoulder. The tom hissed angrily and raced around frantically, but Moonpaw stayed on even when he rolled. Finally the apprentice let go and yowled at the ShadowClan warrior as he raced away. The enemy cat had scratches and bite marks all over and he was very slow escaping. As soon as he crossed the border he collapsed onto the pine needles and let out a weak moan of pain.

That was when Moonpaw noticed Wolfheart for the first time since the fight began. Brokenheart raced to her side and the two of them fought the large gray tom together, disappearing from

sight. Moonpaw looked around just in time to see Wingpaw and Mudpaw fleeing towards the camp with a small black she-cat apprentice pursuing.

After a little ways, when she knew she had won, she stopped and turned around. Her blue eyes locked on to Moonpaw and she spat at him. Moonpaw returned the hostility, both apprentices knowing that they were alone.

“Why are you here?” Moonpaw hissed.

The she-cat watched him for a moment before answering, “Because this is ShadowClan territory now!”

She lunged at Moonpaw and scratched his ear. The ThunderClan apprentice yowled and threw himself at her. He tackled her to the ground and pinned her, but he didn’t think she would be so strong. She slowly pushed him right off and pinned him down instead. They began rolling around, hissing and spitting and biting madly. Suddenly they stopped fighting. Moonpaw waited for her to strike, but she never did. He was about to strike, but he just couldn’t bring himself to do it.

Moonpaw looked down at his paws as he staggered a little bit, but he righted himself again. He took the time to glance at his pelt, and forced himself not to yowl in alarm when he saw all of the red scratches on his flank, most of which were oozing blood. He looked back at the black apprentice, but he only noticed that she was lying down; she was bleeding almost as badly as he was.

He staggered forward a few tail-lengths to check on her, but before he could he fell onto the ground with a thud, and blackness surrounded him.

~

Moonpaw hissed in pain as he raised his head. He cautiously opened his eyes, only to see the moon rising just above the trees. His whole body ached and after taking a deep sniff he realized that all of the other cats were long gone since the battle earlier that morning. The memory of the fight came to his mind,

and he slowly got to his paws. He felt some of his freshly-sealed wounds reopen and he gasped in pain. Then he looked and saw the apprentice he had been fighting still lying on the grass only a tail-length in front of him.

Immediately his dream came to mind, of the warriors turning into pools of blood, but he shook his head to clear the thought. The she-cat may have been bloody, but she wasn't reduced to just a puddle of blood.

Moonpaw gently limped over to her side and looked down at her black pelt. Instantly he knew that she was about the same age as he was and this had been her first real fight as well. Nevertheless, her flank was riddled with scratches that his own clan mates, including his brother, had given her. He gazed down at her helpless, defenseless body, and was relieved to see the faint rising and falling to signal that she was alive.

Wingpaw and my own brother. Moonpaw thought to himself as empathy washed over him. Carefully he settled next to her and began to groom her clumpy, ragged pelt. He winced as he felt a wound on his neck reopen with his rhythmic licking and the taste of dried blood filled his mouth. Regardless, he continued to groom her for what felt like moons.

Eventually, at about moon high, her pelt was looking shiny and as undamaged as it could, though he knew she would always have scars to remember this small battle. He looked at his own pelt again and knew that he would have similar wounds, made worse by the fact that there was no medicine cat to help heal either of them.

Moonpaw felt himself grow weaker again, so he stopped and lay still until his mind began to clear a bit. When he could see clearly, he noticed the she-cat stir. She groaned with the pain, though the ThunderClan apprentice knew his wounds would be far worse after he had licked her clean. She opened her eyes and was immediately surprised, but neither of them said anything for a long while.

Finally, "I thought I was back in camp with Loyalheart."

“Who is that?” Moonpaw asked.

“Our medicine cat,” the ShadowClan apprentice replied, without a single trace of hostility in her tone.

Moonpaw looked at the ground as he answered, “I would give anything to have been with our medicine cat Flamefur during the fight, or even his apprentice Frostfang.”

“Why hasn’t anyone found us yet?” the she-cat asked fearfully.

“They probably think we’re dead. Or maybe both clans think they lost and are too scared to come back to the border,” Moonpaw said weakly.

There was silence for a moment before the she-cat said, “We should probably get back to them then.”

She tried to stand, but her legs just couldn’t support her when she was so wounded. Moonpaw would have stood, but he could already guess how that would turn out and he didn’t want to waste energy trying.

“It’s no use; we have to wait until we have recovered a bit more. We should be better by dawn, I assume,” Moonpaw said.

The she-cat just lay down and flicked her tail weakly in agreement.

“What’s your name?” Moonpaw asked after a long while spent gazing at Silverpelt.

The she-cat didn’t even look at him as she answered, “Breezepaw. What about you?”

“I’m Moonpaw.”

“How long have you been an apprentice? You seem pretty young to me,” Breezepaw said with a flick of her tail, showing that her strength was returning.

Moonpaw sighed before answering, “I was apprenticed yesterday at sundown, what about you?”

Breezepaw let out a strong *mrrow* of laughter, answering, “I had my apprentice ceremony with my brother only this morning. Or, yesterday morning, I suppose now.”

Moonpaw was about to say that it wasn’t morning, but then he notice the tiniest rays of sunshine poking above the trees. As if by magic he felt his strength return partially, and he began hoping that he could make it back to camp soon. He didn’t hesitate to slowly stand, and let out a purr when he felt his legs, stiff as they were, staying straight and supporting his weight.

“Good luck Breezepaw. Maybe I will see you again sometime soon,” Moonpaw said as he began hobbling his way bit by bit through the trees.

“Maybe,” the ShadowClan she-cat replied as she pulled herself to her paws and began walking in the opposite direction. “Good luck, Moonpaw.”

“You too,” Moonpaw replied as he hobbled away, his wounds tearing open again and his mouth begging to be opened to yowl out in pain.

He hobbled through the forest until it was well past sun high, but he still hadn’t managed to reach the camp. Then, a familiar scent wafted towards him not far away, making Moonpaw feel more relieved than he had ever felt before.

“Wolfheart! Fogheart! Softpaw!” he called.

“Moonpaw!?” came the shocked reply as the three cats came out. The deputy continued, “We thought you had died in the fight against ShadowClan! We were just coming to patrol the border again.”

Moonpaw was confused with so few warriors in the patrol after such a recent fight. But, within moments his worries were erased when he saw Sunshine, Critterpaw, and Cheetahleg

come out of the bushes behind.

"You don't look so good," Sunshine was the first to mew, making everyone notice the apprentice's torn pelt and clumpy fur.

Moonpaw had to try his absolute hardest to stay on his paws when his legs began to weaken, but Critterpaw and Softpaw were on either side of him in moments to lend him support.

Wolfheart immediately commanded, "Both of you bring Moonpaw back to camp and take him to see Flamefur, immediately!"

The apprentices dipped their heads in acknowledgement before turning and slowly helping Moonpaw over branches and carefully weaving between the trees. They were silent for a long while, but Moonpaw could feel their gazes looking all over his pelt, amazed at the injuries he had received in the fight.

"What happened?" Critterpaw spoke up after a while. "It looks like you battled all of ShadowClan single-pawed!"

Moonpaw winced at the thought, but replied, "I chased off two apprentices and helped Brokenheart with this one big black-and-white tom."

"Powerfur!?" Softpaw gasped, almost stopping. "I hear Eaglestar almost made him his deputy just because of how vicious he is."

"Well, we've seen that he is vicious," Critterpaw agreed as she waved her tail over Moonpaw's fur.

Moonpaw nodded his head slowly. He knew he was lucky to have escaped from the fight alive, but his fur tingled with excitement as he thought about how exciting it had been. Both of the apprentices had seemed pretty young and he had had a lot of help from Brokenheart with the other cat, but the apprentice still felt pretty powerful.

"Wingpaw says a black she-cat had him and Mudpaw running," Critterpaw chuckled. "Did you see her at all Moonpaw?"

Immediately Moonpaw thought of her, and the long hours he spent grooming her after his clan mates had scratched her almost as badly as he had been scratched. “No, I must have passed out by then,” he lied easily.

“That’s too bad, I had hoped you could have cut her up for me,” Critterpaw hissed, her unsheathed claws tearing into the ground beneath her paws.

Moonpaw shrugged before he slowly padded his way through the thorn barrier behind Softpaw. The blue tom was walking slowly, waiting for Moonpaw to limp through the tunnel before he pressed close again and led the way to Flamefur’s den. Instead of the medicine cat, his apprentice Frostfang was sorting herbs alone further in the den.

“Moonpaw! It looks like you were mauled by a badger!” The apprentice yowled in shock. “What happened?”

“He must have passed out during the fight, we found him halfway between here and the ShadowClan border,” Softpaw explained.

Frostfang nodded and helped the apprentice over to a snug nest not far off, signaling the others away with a flick of his tail. He made sure Moonpaw had stopped moving before going back to his herbs. He returned a minute later with various herbs in a little packet of leaves, setting them on the ground next to the apprentice.

“Which ones hurt the most?” Frostfang asked seriously.

Moonpaw simply flicked his tail, mostly at random, towards a deep scratch on his shoulder. Immediately the medicine cat got to work, chewing up leaves and roots before licking them carefully over the wounds. He then used some cobwebs to stop the bleeding on some of the smaller wounds that had reopened during Moonpaw’s walk.

When he was finished, the cat put two poppy seeds and a leaf in front of Moonpaw and said, “Eat those. Some of your

wounds are getting infected already. There are poppy seeds to ease the pain and burnet to keep up your strength a bit, with some marigold juice to soothe the infections and stop the bleeding. I also put some comfrey root, horsetail, marigold, and dock leaves on the worst of your wounds. When you're done, chew on this chervil leaf and spit it out again. You're lucky you survived!"

Moonpaw felt overwhelmed by all of the herbs the apprentice listed, especially as he thought about the fact that everything was either on or in him. He wanted to explain that he didn't need to be told every remedy in existence, but he was sure that the medicine cat was doing it for his own sake, maybe to prove to himself that he was a good enough apprentice. In any case, Moonpaw was getting very tired.

"You stay there until I tell you otherwise. Those wounds need some serious time to heal!"

Moonpaw vaguely registered what the white tom was saying and slowly nodded his head. But he was already fast asleep by the time he had fully answered.

Chapter Three

Several sunrises later, Flamefur had finally allowed Moonpaw to resume his training. Moonpaw immediately leaped out of the den and padded up to his mentor as she was calling out patrols. It was fun watching Wolfheart. There were so many cats in the clan that they could send four or five cats out on each patrol and still have three patrols of three or four cats each out hunting at once.

Moonpaw watched as three apprentices and two warriors went out to the ShadowClan border, two warriors and two apprentices were sent to the WindClan border, and most of the remaining cats were sent out hunting. Daisyfur and Cowpelt stepped towards Wolfheart with their pelts brushing as they were assigned to a hunting patrol.

"Actually Wolfheart," Daisyfur began with a purr, "Me and Cowpelt were wondering if we could be excused from our warrior duties. We are both expecting kits!"

"Of course you can," the deputy meowed affectionately. "Make yourselves at home in the nursery, me and Moonpaw will join the patrol in your place."

The she-cats flicked their tails in acknowledgement before trotting away happily.

"You ready to go?" Wolfheart asked her apprentice. "We're joining Harepaw and Oakstar."

"I am," Moonpaw said, his eagerness glinting in his eyes.

The deputy led the way over to where Oakstar and his apprentice, Harepaw, were waiting patiently by the thorn barrier. Normally leaders didn't have apprentices, but since there were going to be more apprentices than average warriors when Moonpaw and his littermates were apprenticed Oakstar had decided to take Harepaw on as his apprentice himself.

With only a nod in acknowledgement from Wolfheart, Oakstar led the way out into the forest. As soon as Moonpaw left he shivered a little bit at the fear that washed over him. The last time he had left he had almost not managed to come back, and with his wounds still hurting a bit he felt worried and exposed.

"What can you smell?" Wolfheart asked Moonpaw, stopping abruptly.

Immediately the apprentice lifted his nose and sniffed carefully. He caught whiffs of the strong forest scents that enveloped him, but underneath he could detect the scent of a mouse. Upon realizing how close it was, he merely flicked his tail towards the source of a small scratching sound. His mentor nodded and displayed a hunting crouch. Just as he thought she was going to kill the mouse, she nodded to Moonpaw, implying that he should be the one to kill it.

Moonpaw didn't hesitate. He slipped into the hunter's crouch that he and his littermates had tried to perfect so long ago, but as he crept closer he found it difficult to avoid alerting the prey. He made sure his tail was down and he checked to make sure that he was downwind, something the other apprentices had taught him a few moons before. Then he leaped on the mouse and swiftly killed it, feeling proud of his catch.

"Excellent!" Wolfheart praised, walking towards him. "You waited a bit long and you were a bit too noisy, but that was a good kill."

Moonpaw accepted her words as encouraging and he made a point of being more swift and careful the next time he was stalking prey, but even Oakstar seemed proud of him. Wolfheart showed Moonpaw how to cover the fresh-kill until they could retrieve it later. They continued to hunt throughout the day, until a little past sun high.

"The Gathering is tonight," Oakstar said after his apprentice killed a squirrel and buried it.

Moonpaw looked up at him and meowed, "Then you

should be leaving soon.

"Actually, I was wondering if you were feeling fit enough to join us," Oakstar meowed. "Rumors about you chasing off three cats in that border fight with ShadowClan spread like fire through the camp, and everyone will be hoping for you to join."

"Really?" Moonpaw asked, surprised.

"Usually we let apprentices go on the first full moon after their apprenticeship," Wolfheart explained. "I believe Cloudpaw and Piranhapaw will be staying though. We have to leave *some* apprentices at camp!"

Moonpaw purred and said excitedly, "Then we should get back quickly!"

"Indeed we should," Oakstar agreed before leading the way to all of the buried fresh-kill.

As they stopped at each spot, all of the cats gathered the prey that they had killed themselves. By the time they were entering the camp, Moonpaw had his jaws stuffed full. He struggled to drag a squirrel, two mice, and a starling to the fresh-kill pile, and his mentor carried a pigeon that he had also caught but couldn't carry.

"Eat up," Wolfheart said with a look at the pile of prey that would easily feed each cat for the night and even into the morning. "You deserve a nice bit of prey after that hunt, and you will need your strength for the trek to the Gathering."

Moonpaw's tail shot up at her praise and he was excited to leave for the Gathering. It only happened once every full moon and it would be the first time he had seen cats from another clan, aside from ShadowClan that is. He snatched a plump mouse from the pile and carried it a little ways towards the thorn tunnel, making sure he wouldn't miss the group headed for the Gathering. In a few massive bites he polished off the mouse and respectfully buried his prey bones, as the Warrior Code dictated. Then he padded back over to his mentor and Oakstar, who were getting

ready to leave.

Oakstar took one look around at the cats in front of him and apparently decided that everyone was there. With a flick of his tail he led them all through the thorn barrier and the clan raced off through the sunset. He and Wolfheart led them over the WindClan border without hesitation, but with each paw-step Moonpaw stiffened more and more with fear. They were allowed onto WindClan and RiverClan territory during the full moon, but it was still a little worrying.

The ThunderClan cats padded on in silence, until Moonpaw caught a strange scent. It smelled of cats, not as horrid-smelling as ShadowClan, but unusual. He quickly noticed that the scent had been around them for a long while, and he realized that it must be WindClan. Sure enough, a large group of the smelly cats appeared from behind a hill. Oakstar paused for a moment to let them catch up.

Oakstar dipped his head respectfully to a brown-and gray she-cat with rough-looking fur before saying, “Hello Grassstar. Has WindClan been doing well this past moon?”

The she-cat dipped her head in return before answering, “You will find out at the Gathering.” Her voice was soft and gentle, like that of a queen speaking to her kits.

Oakstar twitched his ears to signal that he heard before the two leaders brought their clans around the territory. After a short while the two clans reached RiverClan territory, and the scent of the lake grew many times stronger, probably because the RiverClan cats relied so heavily on it. Not long after, they reached a long tree that stretched between them and an island further out on the lake. In unspoken agreement the two leaders led the way across, followed by cats of both WindClan and ThunderClan together.

Moonpaw finally found himself facing the tree, but his eagerness evaporated as he gazed at the trunk; cleared of most of its branches and its smooth white skin gleaming in the moonlight. The bark had long before been ripped away after numerous moons of paws padding and clawing at it. With a light shove from Shadepaw,

Moonpaw made his way onto the tree.

The apprentice had to unsheathe his claws to keep his balance, digging in tightly with every claw he had. He tried not to look down at the black water below, and instead focused on the spotted tail of the WindClan she-cat ahead of him. She walked across a fox-length ahead of him with ease, landing on the other side with her head and tail high before she trotted off to join a group of RiverClan warriors.

Moonpaw took a deep breath and leaped down from the tree, landing awkwardly on the island, though he was safe and sound. He stepped a little ways away while he waited for Mudpaw and Shadepaw. Mudpaw was following a slow-moving ginger WindClan apprentice as she struggled her way across.

While Moonpaw waited, he looked around and saw more cats than he had ever seen in his life. Muscular, brave warriors from other clans and their tiny apprentices walked around greeting each other. ShadowClan had not appeared, however. Moonpaw turned back to see that the she-cat had finally jumped off the bridge, and she and another WindClan apprentice were padding towards him and Shadepaw.

"Hi," the apprentice said cheerily. "I'm Beachpaw, and this is my brother Beechpaw."

"I'm Shadepaw and this is my brother Moonpaw. Why do the two of you have the same name?" Moonpaw's littermate asked.

Beechpaw chuckled, "Mother says our names are different, but they do sound the same. The two of us are just hoping more than ever to get our warrior names, so we can be different!"

Moonpaw let out a *mrrow* of laughter before asking, "Is this your first Gathering?"

Beachpaw shook her head, "No, we came last full moon. What about you?"

"We were just apprenticed a quarter-moon ago,"

Moonpaw answered with a sigh. “I got caught up in a border fight with ShadowClan and just resumed my training today.”

“I’m sorry to hear it. I don’t know if we should talk about battles at a Gathering though,” Beachpaw said as she looked around nervously. Her eyes lit up when he seemed to notice something. “It’s Cherrypaw! Bye Moonpaw, bye Shadepaw!”

“Bye,” Moonpaw called after her.

Shadepaw didn’t respond to the WindClan apprentice, but he went over to Mudpaw and the two walked away without Moonpaw. He felt his ears flatten in his sadness, but he hid it as soon as he smelled the strong, swampy scent of ShadowClan. He panicked for a moment and back away into the bushes to watch them cross the bridge to the island.

Moonpaw forced himself not to hiss in fear as he recognized the first cat that crossed. It was the cat he had seen in his dream the night after he became an apprentice. *The warrior code will be broken; the forest will turn crimson with the blood of betrayal; cats will decide where their loyalties truly lie,* the words from the dream echoed in his head. He watched the tom with long black fur and a light gray, almost white head for a while until his gaze was drawn away.

He gasped as he saw the last ShadowClan cat cross the bridge. It was none other than Breezepaw, the apprentice that Moonpaw had shared tongues with after the fierce battle between their two clans. Her fur was still ragged and she didn’t seem to have fully recovered physically, but she moved around gracefully, proving that she was just as loyal and ferocious as any of her clan mates.

“Breezepaw!” Moonpaw couldn’t help meowing as the cat before her left to join a group of WindClan and RiverClan apprentices.

The black she-cat turned and stared at the bushes in disbelief. “Moonpaw! I thought-“

A howl interrupted her, and Moonpaw looked up to see the Oakstar, Grassstar, and a beautiful white she-cat sitting on branches in a massive tree at the center of the clearing. Below them the long-haired black-and-white tom that Moonpaw was afraid of clawed his way up the tree to sit next to Grassstar. Moonpaw obediently sat next to Sunshine and Cheetahleg below the tree and forced himself to forget about Breezepaw. He gazed in awe at the four great leaders.

Oakstar stood and was the first to share, “This moon has been very prosperous for ThunderClan. We have bountiful prey, eight new apprentices called Rootpaw, Holepaw, Harepaw, Mudpaw, Moonpaw, Shadepaw, Cloudpaw, and Piranhapaw, and a new warrior named Swiftwind. We thank StarClan for such a gift.”

Cats from every clan except ShadowClan cheered loudly, making Moonpaw’s fur grow hot under all of the attention. A few of the cats looked at him and his siblings and their cheers grew even louder, until Oakstar waved his tail for silence.

“Snowstar?” Oakstar asked the RiverClan leader respectfully.

The white she-cat in the tree nodded and stood, announcing, “RiverClan has also had a good moon. We have a new warrior, Cornfur, and his mentor Streamfur and her sister Lakewind have decided to join the elders. We wish to thank them for the service they have given to our clan and hope that they live many peaceful moons in our elders’ den.”

There were more cheers, though they weren’t quite as noisy and most of them were respectful purrs directed at the RiverClan she-cats. The noise died down soon enough on its own and Grassstar stood for her turn.

“WindClan has little news. Prey is plentiful in this wonderful green-leaf, and we have a new apprentice, Buffetpaw.” There were a few congratulations to the apprentice, but little more.

Last of all, the ShadowClan leader began, “ShadowClan has two new apprentices, Duskpaw and Breezepaw, and a new kit

named Barkkit, but we have had some difficulty. In a fight against ThunderClan some warriors got injured, and I wish to apologize to all of ThunderClan for the severe injuries that their apprentice Moonpaw has sustained because of the fight."

Howls of protest immediately erupted from the ShadowClan cats, and all of the other clan cats were thoroughly surprised by the apology that came from the black-and-white tom. Moonpaw was concerned most of all.

"But Eaglestar, Breezepaw nearly died in the fight, what about her!?" a ShadowClan tom, the one the Moonpaw helped Brokenheart fight, yowled louder than the rest.

"It was a foolish mistake bringing such a young apprentice to a battle," the ShadowClan leader replied softly.

"Fox dung!" most of the ShadowClan cats howled at once. Another warrior hissed, "Going soft for those ThunderClan cats?"

"The Gathering is dismissed!" Eaglestar yowled above them all before making his way down the tree.

As cats began to leave, ShadowClan in the lead, Moonpaw spotted Breezepaw a short ways away at the very edge of the group of ShadowClan cats. He didn't want to go a whole moon without seeing her again. Even though they had met under terrible circumstances, he felt that they were a bit closer because of their injuries. He padded up to her before looking around. ShadowClan cats faced away from them, towards the tree bridge, and the other clans were saying their farewells.

When he knew no one was looking, Moonpaw whispered in her ear, "Can we meet each other again, soon?"

Breezepaw looked surprised by the suggestion, but when she turned her blue gaze on him she whispered back, "Perhaps, on the third night from now?"

"Where should we meet?"

The black she-cat thought for a moment before answering, “I have seen the halfbridge on your territory, shall we meet there?”

Moonpaw nodded.

“Breezepaw!” the gray tom that had fought in the border battle with Wolfheart suddenly called to her.

Breezepaw quickly said good-bye to Moonpaw, “My mentor Glareheart is calling for me. I will see you in three nights!”

Moonpaw nodded and watched her leap onto the tree bridge with her tail high in the air before Snowstar, the leader of WindClan, jumped up after her and disguised her from his view. The apprentice then turned back to join his clan mates to wait for his turn to cross. He could barely contain his excitement at the idea of meeting Breezepaw in only a few days.

Chapter Four

The third sunrise after the Gathering, Moonpaw was following his mentor out of the thorn barrier. Behind him he knew that Softpaw, Rootpaw, Gingerpaw, Critterpaw, Shadepaw, Mudpaw, Cloudpaw, and all of their mentors were following closely. But, since Daisyfur and Cowpelt both had apprentices and were in the nursery, Tigerscar and Kickingbird had taken over their training in the queens' places. The clan had had more than enough fresh-kill and there were just enough warriors for the dawn and sunhigh patrols, so Wolfheart was taking most of the apprentices and warriors to the training clearing for a surprise.

It would be Moonpaw's first day of battle training, and even though he was nervous about the special surprise he was excited to finally learn fighting skills. He would have gone earlier, but his mentor had insisted that he wait until his wounds had recovered well enough. She explained that the twisting, turning, and jerking of battle could easily aggravate old wounds. Moonpaw looked ahead to see a large clearing with a large rock at the very edge. Wolfheart jumped onto the rock and yowled for everyone's attention.

"Here we are," the deputy said with an excited gleam in her eyes as everyone gathered around her. "I know a lot of you warriors don't want to be here, but I thank you for coming anyway. I have a new idea for battle-training."

"And what is that?" Fogheart growled from the crowd with his tail lashing moodily.

Wolfheart looked at each cat and announced, "By starting a battle."

Howls of protest suddenly erupted from even the apprentices, and Moonpaw was sure that they could be heard all the way to the RiverClan camp. Wolfheart waited patiently for the noise to die down, but when it never did, she silenced them with a twitch

of her tail.

"Don't worry," she purred in amusement, "It is a friendly battle. We will split into two groups, and fight as if we would in a real battle, only claws will be sheathed and make sure that bites don't puncture the skin."

The apprentices instantly looked more eager, though the warriors seemed a little uneasy about the idea.

"How will this work any better than regular training?" Moonpaw's mother asked calmly. "How will we know when to stop?"

There was amusement in Wolfheart's eyes as she answered, "It's simple. Apprentices always learn more from battle, because they see exactly how different moves can be applied and can learn exactly how to respond. The apprentices can observe the warriors' superior fighting techniques in an actual battle without the risk of injury. But, we will *act* as though it's a real battle."

"How do we do that?" Sunshine asked curiously.

"Easy," Moonpaw's mentor meowed. "If you get 'scratched' a lot, drop onto the ground and pretend to be dead, and the same goes for if you're bitten in the neck. The fake battle will be over when all of the cats on one team are pretending to be dead. If we have to, we can change teams in later battles to make them more balanced."

There were quite murmurs until they eventually died down and Swiftwind asked, "What will the teams be?"

Wolfheart let out a *mrrow* of laughter before she said, "I will be the leader of the ShadowClan team with Moonpaw, Rootpaw, Cloudpaw, Gingerpaw, Twolegheart, Lightningfur, and Tigerscar. Sunshine will lead WindClan with Mudpaw, Shadepaw, Critterpaw, Softpaw, Fogheart, Swiftwind, and Brokenheart. Agreed?"

"Can't we be RiverClan?" Sunshine asked jokingly.

"Only if you want to fight in the lake!" Moonpaw found

himself yowling back, making the cats around him laugh.

Sunshine's eyes widened in mock alarm before he turned to Wolfheart and said, "WindClan will start from over in the trees toward our border. Get ready for the attack!"

The orange tom led his team into the trees towards the ThunderClan camp and when they disappeared from sight Wolfheart sprang from the rock to land beside her own cats. She told them to be silent and signaled with a flick of her tail for them to follow her. Moonpaw obeyed and she led them all to the middle of the clearing and spread them out in a full circle so that the fake WindClan warriors couldn't surprise them from a different angle. She then settled herself on the grass and they waited in silence.

Then, Moonpaw heard a relatively quiet yowl from off to his right. He looked over and saw Sunshine and his patrol sprinting through the grass towards them. With a few forced hisses, the cats collided. Moonpaw found himself fighting Critterpaw a little ways from the rest of the fight. She swung at him with her forepaw but he dodged, swooping in to knock her off her feet. She guessed his move and rolled aside.

Then, Moonpaw felt the apprentice leap onto his back and gently cling on with sheathed paws. She was much heavier than him and he felt his nose slam into the earth. Luckily, she didn't expect it and she sprawled forward. The black-and-silver cat seized his opportunity and dove onto her belly. Her tortoiseshell fur surrounded Moonpaw as he closed his jaws gently around her throat for only a moment. He let go again and she went limp with a purr of amusement, pretending to be dead.

Moonpaw immediately jumped back into the fight, tackling a random brown body. He had thought that it was Rootpaw and they would have an even fight, but too late he realized he was wrong. It was Brokenheart, one of the greatest fighters in the entire clan. He fought as viciously as he could without actually scratching his clan mate, but the warrior was just too much for him. Brokenheart swatted him lightly several times on either side, though for a warrior they were still pretty powerful.

With a sigh, Moonpaw fell to the ground and pretended to be dead. The apprentice decided to use his time wisely. He watched Wolfheart struggle with Sunshine, until the she-cat pawed the tom lightly in the throat and he fell to the ground with a fake, gasping breath. By now the ground was littered with the “bodies” of his clan mates, and the five remaining cats were being careful, trying not to tread on them as they fought.

Then the last apprentice, Softpaw, fell to the ground. The cats remaining were Brokenheart and Swiftwind on one team, and Wolfheart and Tigerscar on the other. Tigerscar easily sent Swiftwind to the ground, and he and the deputy turned on Brokenheart. The grey “WindClan” tom eyed them both warily Wolfheart pretended to limp as she rushed towards Brokenheart, only striking him once on the shoulder before he smacked her in the stomach and she fell to the ground in front of him.

Now it was just down to the two greatest ThunderClan warriors that had fought in the mock battle. They circled each other without moving much, and their tails lashed; each one eager to win the victory for their team. Suddenly Tigerscar sprang, landing a soft blow on Brokenheart’s flank. He retreated quickly, but not before the gray tom hit one of his hind legs. After that they wrestled each other in a frenzy of silver fur, both landing considerable blows.

The mock battle ended with Tigerscar collapsing on the ground beneath Brokenheart. Moonpaw thought it was real, until he heard the faint purring of the silver cat that was slightly muffled by the grass. The last cat standing let out a howl of victory, before looking around the clearing with great sorrow in his eyes and his tail drooped.

“So much death,” he murmured softly, though he was purring loudly.

“Congratulations!” Wolfheart meowed as she rose back onto her paws.

Moonpaw quickly followed her lead, carefully standing to his paws and stretching his now sore muscles. Around him cats were beginning to stand as well. Most of them paused for a moment

to groom themselves before going over to Brokenheart and mewing their own congratulations for him. The tom stood with his tail straight up in his pride.

"Is anyone hurt?" Wolfheart called out. Every cat responded with purrs or simple tail gestures and the deputy said, "If you're all fine, we should be heading back to camp. You can rest all you like, but I expect you to be ready in case I call you for the next patrol."

Moonpaw looked up at the sky in surprise. The last patrol of the day was usually just before sunset, and it was right between sunset and sunhigh. Moonpaw realized with a jolt that as soon as he got back to camp, he would have to eat quickly and leave almost immediately to make it to the halfbridge to meet Breezepaw. He forced himself to appear calm and relaxed as he followed the massive patrol back to camp.

He was the second to pass through the thorn barrier, behind his mentor. Without taking a single paw step in another direction he headed for the fresh-kill pile. As he picked out a delicious-smelling thrush, he grew painfully aware that Wolfheart was right next to him for every step. When he began walking away towards the apprentices' den to eat it, she even followed him a few steps. The fur on his pelt began to prickle with anxiety and he put the thrush down and faced his mentor.

"Do you want something?" he asked, his slightly hostile tone making the deputy jump, and the apprentice regretted ever speaking.

Luckily, his mentor shrugged it off and said, "I was just worried about you. I wanted to make sure you were doing alright after the fake fight."

"Well I'm fine," Moonpaw told her, calming his voice as much as he could.

Wolfheart nodded and said, "In that case, do you think you might want to come to the WindClan border with me and Swiftwind?"

Moonpaw gazed at his mentor for a long time. He would never forgive himself if he missed his opportunity to see Breezepaw that night, but he also couldn't directly refuse his mentor and the deputy of the clan. It hadn't been an order, but if he said no she might become suspicious of him, and he didn't want Wolfheart to find out about his secret meeting.

"I think I have a stomachache," He lied weakly, hanging his head low to hide his doubts and make it look as though he were sick.

Wolfheart looked at him for a long time before she mewed, "Alright, I'll get Piranhapaw and Volewhisker to come instead, but you take yourself right over to Flamefur and get something to feel better quickly. In the morning we are going on a patrol whether you still feel sick or not."

Moonpaw dipped his head and picked up the thrush. He began padding towards the fresh-kill pile to make it look as if he were going to put it back, because a sick cat probably wouldn't want to eat so much prey. When he saw Wolfheart turn and pad away with the evening patrol, he settled down again next to the fresh-kill pile and ate the bird in a few swift bites.

For a while later Moonpaw was lying in his bed in the apprentices' den, trying to pretend as though he were asleep. Every once in a while he opened his eyes to gaze out across the clearing. He saw the last warrior disappear into the warriors' den, and felt more than saw Softpaw settle next to him in his nest. Moonpaw waited a short time longer until he was sure that all of the apprentices were asleep before he softly padded out of the den.

Moonpaw was walking towards the thorn barrier when he realized that there would be a guard at the end of the tunnel for the night. Whoever it was would ask where he was going. So, Moonpaw turned around and walked across the clearing to the dirtplace tunnel. He slipped right through and was free in the forest in only a few moments, running along as fast as he could while still being wary of his surroundings.

He felt his stomach churning with worry as he began to

smell ShadowClan. The memory of his horrible injuries little more than a quarter-moon ago came flooding back to him as he came closer to the swampy stench. He reached the border only a little while later and followed it down to the lake. Since the gathering he had been along the twoleg path that marked the border only once, and at that time he had only caught a glimpse of the halfbridge. Still, he trusted his paws and followed the same trail he had followed with his mentor through the trees until he came to the spot where their patrol had ended.

Moonpaw looked out through the trees and saw the long, but incomplete bridge. At the end he could just barely see a small figure, gazing up at Silverpelt in silence. The apprentice took a deep breath and cautiously padded out to the base of the bridge, though when he reached it the cat still hadn't noticed him.

Then the ThunderClan cat looked out at the halfbridge that loosely resembled the tree bridge to the Gathering place, though it was flat and much wider. He slowly padded across it, and the shadowy figure turned to him, hackles rising in alarm as it either heard or smelled him approaching, though he had made it halfway across the bridge by then.

"Relax, it' only me," Moonpaw soothed the cat.

"Moonpaw," Breezepaw said with a purr. "I was beginning to think you wouldn't come."

Moonpaw padded the rest of the way towards her and sat next to her at the edge of the halfbridge. The twoleg scent was overwhelming there, but at least it would disguise Breezepaw's scent. The ThunderClan apprentice felt uncomfortable out in the open, with the lake spread out before them in a seemingly endless stretch of water.

The two sat uncomfortably next to each other until Breezepaw broke the silence, "How has your training been?"

"Good, I just had battle training today with most of my clan mates," Moonpaw said cautiously, wondering how much of their training secrets he should expose to the enemy cat.

Breezepaw sighed, “It seems as though battle training is endless, doesn’t it?”

Moonpaw looked at her confusedly before answering, “This was my first time.”

“Weird. Half of my training has been battle so far,” Breezepaw said as she continued to stare at the StarClan warriors above them. “How have your wounds been doing? You know, a-after the battle a while ago.”

“Fine, and yours?” Moonpaw asked, more concerned for her.

“Loyalheart says I will have quite a few scars and I had a nasty infection on my shoulder, but overall she thinks I will recover fully,” the ShadowClan apprentice said.

Moonpaw meowed, “Thank StarClan. I would never forgive my brother if I had found out that he had permanently injured you.”

“Thank StarClan you made it back alive as well. Glareheart won’t stop bragging about how badly he tore up a cat named Wolfheart.”

“That’s my mentor, and our deputy,” Moonpaw said as he too began to watch Silverpelt.

“No kidding?” Breezepaw said with a gentle purr. “Glareheart is my mentor and deputy too. He keeps bragging about our victory but it seems as though your clan have been marking them well in the same place.”

Moonpaw listened carefully for any sort of bitterness or hostility in her voice, but there was none. If anything the black she-cat seemed saddened by the loss only because it wasted everyone’s valuable time and energy. Moonpaw looked down at the lake to see the moon reflected in it, turning most of it white only a mouse-length below his paws. He gently touched the top of it with his tail, slightly stirring the soft water before it resumed its flawless shape.

“Who was that apprentice you were fighting next to, the one with black and ginger fur?” Moonpaw asked after a moment.

“That would be my brother Duskpaw,” Breezepaw said as she laid down on the halfbridge and dangled one of her paws over the edge into the water. “He scares me a bit with how excited he is to prove himself at the next battle, but I still love him.”

Moonpaw shivered and mewed, “I have four littermates, and I haven’t seen much of any of them since we became apprentices. In fact, I haven’t seen much of any of the apprentices for a while. I guess there are just too many cats in the clan to be paying any attention to me.”

“I know how you feel. Duskpaw may care about me, but he’s always off with his mentor training or hunting or patrolling without me. All of the other cats just sort of go about their business. The only cats that have ever payed any attention to me are my mother and father.”

“I don’t even know who my father is,” Moonpaw said with a shrug. He had assumed that every cat grew up without caring who had been their father.

Breezepaw looked up at him for the first time since they had been sitting together and meowed, “I would’ve thought a cat like you and I would need someone close like a father. I may not see him often; by I don’t know what I’d do without Deereyes to guide me through my chores when my mother and mentor aren’t around.”

“My father could be any number of cats,” Moonpaw said as he went through all of the cats he knew with black or gray fur in his head. “Actually, I suppose it could only be Tigerscar, Brokenheart, or Lightningfur, but Lightningfur’s mate is Cowpelt. Plus, Tigerscar and Brokenheart both have completely gray fur as well as my mother. I honestly don’t know who my father could be.”

“I’ve heard of kits being born a little bit different from their parents,” Breezepaw reassured him, but Moonpaw didn’t buy it.

“But three of us have mostly black fur, and one has pretty dark gray fur. It just doesn’t make any sense to me.”

Breezepaw yawned and looked at the sky. Moonpaw followed her gaze to see the moon almost directly between the middle of the sky and the forest and falling quickly. They would have to get back to their camps swiftly, before the dawn patrols left and they were caught outside. Moonpaw stood and stretched.

“This was nice,” Breezepaw said as she followed his lead. “Perhaps we can meet again?”

Moonpaw nodded, “A quarter-moon from now, same place?”

Breezepaw nodded and the two cats padded along the halfbridge in silence until they reached its base on the shore. Moonpaw flexed his claws, enjoying the feel of the dirt after the long day of travel and training.

“Good-bye Breezepaw,” He whispered before turning towards his own territory.

The black ShadowClan apprentice gave a silent flick of her tail before vanishing into the pine trees of her own territory. As Moonpaw traced his way back to the ThunderClan camp, he couldn’t help wondering who his father could be.

Chapter Five

It was a little past sunhigh the day of the next full moon as Moonpaw returned to the camp with his jaws filled with fresh-kill. Wolfheart and Volewhisker followed behind with their own catch before the three cats deposited their prey on the fresh-kill pile. News had been going around the camp the past few days of Daisyfur and Cowpelt's newborn kits, but Moonpaw had yet to see them. He and Breezepaw had continued to meet at the halfbridge and even at the green-leaf twolegplace for the past moon, and Moonpaw hoped to see her at the Gathering that night.

"Moonpaw, can you bring some prey over to Rockstripe and bring him new bedding?" Wolfheart asked after she put her two squirrels on the pile.

"Actually, I was going to visit Cowpelt and Daisyfur's kits, if that's alright?" Moonpaw said, barely pausing to turn around and wait for permission.

His mentor sighed and replied, "I suppose that's fine; I'll take something to Rockstripe. But I want you to change his bedding fist thing in the morning. Don't forget about the gathering tonight, though."

Moonpaw nodded and padded off to the nursery with his tail high in the air. Treeleg was sitting outside, supervising her kits as they tumbled around each other and pretended to fight. She didn't look at the apprentice as he passed, but flicked her tail for him to go inside. He dipped his head in thanks and silently made his way inside, welcomed by the sweet smell of milk and the little squeals of newborn kits next to their mothers.

Cowpelt was fast asleep. She had four kits, but only one of them was crying as it struggled to find milk. The crying she-kit was a tabby, white as snow with black stripes all along her body, making her look like a tiger frozen in ice. The other three kits were also females, surprisingly. One of them was a dark silver color and

was fast asleep next to her bluish-black sister. The last looked exactly like her father Lightningfur, with gray fur lightly tinted dark blue.

Moonpaw looked over at Daisyfur's three kits, all of them whining and crying. The loudest of them was an orange tabby she-cat, though her stripes were very difficult to see. Her hind legs, forepaws, tail-tip, chest, and muzzle were a bright white, but the backs of her hind legs almost looked dirty with little ginger patches. The smallest of the litter looked a tiny bit like Breezepaw's brother Duskpaw, with a black tail, black legs, black ears, and a little black ring around his right eye. The rest of him was dark ginger. The last kit was the oddest of them all. Her back was russet, almost blood colored, and slowly faded to white down by her paws.

Not wanting to wake Cowpelt, Moonpaw let out a purr of gratitude towards Daisyfur, thanking her for the chance to see the kits, before he left the nursery again. He dipped his head in farewell to Treeleg and walked over to the gathering patrol of cats near the thorn barrier. Much like the last time, Oakstar looked at each cat carefully to make sure all of them were the ones he had chosen to go to the Gathering, and he made sure that no cat would be left behind. With a nod of his head, he vanished into the thorn tunnel and the rest of the group followed swiftly behind.

Moonpaw looked around at the cats that had been chosen, seeing all four of his siblings and their mother trotting along through the forest. Once again Moonpaw wondered who his father could be, among the many cats in his clan. None of them seemed to be the right fit. The only possible conclusion he could come up with was that perhaps Badgerface or Swiftwind and their mate had been a grey or silver tom? Swiftwind could have been ashamed of having kits at such a young age and asked Kickingbird to raise him and his littermates. Moonpaw quickly banished the thought from his mind. Swiftwind or Badgerface would have said something to them if they were their mother, wouldn't they?

The black and silver apprentice shook his head and pressed on, brushing pelts with his mentor as they walked. After a while they entered WindClan territory, but they went the whole length of the territory without as much as a whisker to give away

their presence. Moonpaw quickly decided that they must have already made it to the island, or were maybe running late. In any case, the ThunderClan cats pressed on into RiverClan territory.

Soon after trotting right past the fishy scent-markers of the RiverClan territory, the wind shifted and the cats were able to smell what cats were on the island. Moonpaw sniffed, even opening his mouth to get the best sense of what clans were there. He could smell RiverClan, WindClan, and ShadowClan, but the scents were very weak and old, probably from the last gathering even.

Without any hesitation, Oakstar leaped onto the tree bridge and led his clan onto the Gathering place island. Moonpaw was fourth to cross, right after the deputy Wolfheart, and he found that he was able to keep his balance on the log a bit better than the last time he had been there. He skillfully jumped down onto the grassy shore of the island and leisurely walked by with his mentor to the massive tree at the center. Quite surprisingly, Moonpaw found that he was right and they were the first clan to arrive.

Before the last ThunderClan cat had crossed the bridge, Moonpaw already smelled RiverClan and even a faint trace of ShadowClan not far behind. Moonpaw choked back a mrrow of laughter when he saw that most of the RiverClan cats were swimming across to the island. Only the newest RiverClan elders and a queen were using the bridge behind Moonpaw's clanmates.

After the queen, Moonpaw recognized the fearsome ShadowClan leader Eaglestar, and a shiver ran down his back when he thought about his dream. After the black-and-gray tom came his deputy Glareheart, and then the deputy's apprentice: Moonpaw's secret best friend. He purred when he saw the black she-cat apprentice leap from the bridge next to her mentor, and Moonpaw suddenly forced it back when he remembered that they were at a Gathering.

WindClan cats began crossing the bridge, and Moonpaw saw Breezepaw walk off with Beachpaw and Beechpaw. Using them as an excuse to see Breezepaw, Moonpaw walked up to them and sat down next to Beechpaw and listened to their conversation.

“It’s nice to meet you Breezepaw,” Beachpaw was saying. “It doesn’t look like there are many ShadowClan apprentices.

Breezepaw sighed, “Yeah. We still don’t have any more kits either, so it’s just me and my brother Duskpaw doing everything, since we’re the youngest apprentices. And, of course, he is always excused from caring for our elders because he used to be off with Dangerstripe training. Now that she’s in the nursery, I just hope he is forced to stay in camp a little more often.”

Moonpaw was about to say something when a yowl cut him off. Eaglestar was calling for the Gathering to begin, so each cat went to join their clans beneath the great tree that all four leaders were resting on comfortably. The leaders looked at each other for a moment, until Grassstar started.

“Welcome all clan cats to the Gathering!” She said excitedly, making Moonpaw realize that it must have been the first time she started off a Gathering. “WindClan is doing well this moon. Our medicine cat apprentice has received his full name and will now be called Sandcloud. We also have two new queens expecting kits: Oceanscream and Bushfrost.”

Delighted purrs sounded from every clan around the clearing, congratulating the medicine cat apprentice and the new WindClan queens, only one of which was present at the Gathering. Next was Snowstar, and the cats immediately settled down to wait for her news.

“This past moon has had its grief for RiverClan. Our elder Loneskies has moved on to StarClan, and under the truce of the full moon we ask that every clan honor her for her wisdom and loyalty.” There was a pause as every cat sat silently in respect for the dead elder before Snowstar continued, “But, along with grief there is some good news. Our warrior Stripeclaw is expecting kits.”

There were some happy words between warriors before Oakstar stood and announced, “ThunderClan has prospered greatly this past moon, though we too grieve for Loneskies. May she thrive among our warrior ancestors in Silverpelt. But, ThunderClan has seven new kits this moon. We welcome Autumnkit, Mountainkit,

Banditkit, Silverkit, Icekit, Stormkit, and Tigerkit as our newest ThunderClan cats."

There were many purrs from the cats around Moonpaw, and he heard RiverClan warriors near him muttering about how cute the kits must be. Yes, they are very cute, Moonpaw mewed in his own thoughts.

"Things have been well in ShadowClan has been doing well too. We have two new warriors, Airfeather and Sheepfur, and Dangerstripe is expecting kits," Eaglestar meowed while his gaze roamed over the ThunderClan cats for something.

"Make the other announcement!" Glareheart yowled, hunger glowing in his eyes.

Moonpaw looked over at Breezepaw curiously, and she returned his gaze with a mixture of excitement, fear, and concern. The ThunderClan apprentice felt disturbed by the gleam in her eyes. Clearly the announcement Glareheart had mentioned, or something about it, had her worried for whatever reason. Whatever that reason, Moonpaw was about to find out. Eaglestar stood and purred as his gaze fell on Moonpaw and his siblings.

"The most important thing I wanted to bring up is of ThunderClan's newest apprentices," Eaglestar said as his purr grew louder. Moonpaw felt the fur on his back rise before Eaglestar yowled, "I would like for Moonpaw, Cloudpaw, Shadepaw, Mudpaw, and Piranhapaw to join me in ShadowClan."

"And why would we just send them to you?" Wolfheart immediately hissed, standing over her apprentice protectively.

Eaglestar meowed, "Because they are my kits! I think they've spent enough time with you ThunderClan filth."

"They belong in ThunderClan with us," Brokenheart hissed through gritted teeth as he stood and flexed his claws.

Eaglestar flicked his tail in annoyance before answering, "I beg to differ. If you don't give them to me, ShadowClan will take

them by force!”

Moonpaw looked fearfully at Breezepaw, but her gaze had already gone to her leader. All of the ShadowClan cats were gazing at Eaglestar in shock. Clearly they knew what Eaglestar was going to say, but they had never guessed that he would get so hostile. However, they all obeyed the warrior code and stayed silent.

“You go ahead and try,” Oakstar spat. “If you set one paw on ThunderClan territory, we’ll rip your fur off!”

Moonpaw and several other cats in the clearing looked fearfully up at the moon, but most of the clan cats were too focused on the ThunderClan and ShadowClan leaders to notice that a thick layer of storm clouds were covering it.

“Who says we’re going on ThunderClan territory?” Eaglestar asked as his tail lashed.

A flash of lightning tore through the sky as Eaglestar leaped at Oakstar on a nearby branch. The two toms hissed and spat for a moment, but in a flurry of tooth and claw they fell to the ground. They fell so far down, Moonpaw guessed he would need a dozen foxes to get anywhere close to the distance they fell.

His heart stopped as rain began to pour from the sky and the two leaders crashed onto the ground. Eaglestar had held Oakstar in place as they fell, and the ThunderClan leader howled in pain as he landed awkwardly on his side. Wolfheart and Moonpaw both dove forward, but they were still five tail-lengths away when Eaglestar raised his massive paw and slashed Oakstar’s throat with three unsheathed claws.

Moonpaw stopped dead in his tracks next to the deputy and watched as his leader’s body convulsed and blood oozed from his neck. The tom’s green eyes glazed over as he lay still for several long moments with Moonpaw’s father towering over him.

ThunderClan’s leader had lost his ninth and final life during the truce of the full moon.

Chapter Six

There was dead silence for several long moments as every single cat in the clearing stared at Eaglestar with terror on their faces. Lightning flashed in the sky for the second time, and many of the clan cats seemed to notice the dark sky for the first time. As soon as the first drops of rain fell, RiverClan and WindClan bolted from the island. Even the pregnant RiverClan queen and the elders swam in an effort to flee the island before they were struck by the lightning.

The ThunderClan cats bristled and hissed at the ShadowClan cats, but Moonpaw was the only one that noticed how half-hearted the enemy clan's replies were. They were just as shocked as the ThunderClan cats that a leader had been slain at a Gathering as the ThunderClan cats were. Moonpaw, however, was hissing and spitting at them all as if they had been the ones to kill his leader.

"You have two days to give me my kits," Eaglestar snarled.

The ShadowClan leader raced after them, chasing them as each ThunderClan cat raced over the tree bridge. Moonpaw slipped countless times, but he didn't dare slow down. The ThunderClan cats would have likely been able to defeat the ShadowClan cats, but they were leaderless, and none of them dared attack on the night of the truce, even if Eaglestar had.

Moonpaw leaped off the bridge and risked glancing back. He felt his body freeze in horror at what he saw. Cloudpaw scrambled down the end of the bridge and passed Moonpaw as she raced blindly away after her clan. But in the middle of the bridge, Mudpaw and Shadepaw were hesitating. Moonpaw watched them exchange a glance. The blood-thirsty ambition was plain in their green and blue eyes from where Moonpaw stood.

In unspoken agreement, the two apprentices turned around and went back onto the island. Moonpaw could just barely see their murderous father walking out from the cover of the trees

surrounding the island, and his eyes lit up in satisfaction when the leader saw his kits. All three of their tails curled in excitement, before Mudpaw and Shadepaw vanished into the trees to join the other ShadowClan cats.

Moonpaw immediately turned away and raced over the ground as fast as his legs would carry him. Obviously his clan was thinking the same thing that he was, however, since he made it all the way to the camp without seeing them. When he walked through the thorn barrier into the camp, he saw the deputy Wolfheart, addressing the clan.

"What's going to happen to us?" Daisyfur yowled from the nursery, curling her tail protectively around her kits.

Wolfheart turned her gaze on Moonpaw and asked, "Moonpaw, where's Mudpaw and Shadepaw? I would have thought you would have waited for them."

"Wait all you want, they aren't coming," Moonpaw replied, his fur standing on end after watching his littermates greet their father happily after what he'd done.

"What do you mean?" Sunshine called from somewhere in the audience.

"They joined Eaglestar," Moonpaw answered as he sat right inside the entrance of the camp, facing the ground in his shock.

Nearly every cat howled in fear after the apprentice spoke. Obviously Wolfheart had explained everything that had happened, including Eaglestar's warning that they only had two days before they would attack, unless ThunderClan handed Moonpaw, Cloudpaw, and Piranhapaw over to the vicious cats. Moonpaw looked up to see his two remaining littermates staring at each other, and he saw his own fear reflected in their eyes.

"What will we do?" Cowpelt asked as she padded out to ask her friend's question again.

“Wolfheart will be leaving for the Moonpool *immediately* to receive her nine lives from StarClan,” Moonpaw heard the medicine cat, Flamefur, say as he padded over to Highledge from his den. He looked up at ThunderClan’s new leader to see if she agreed.

The idea surprised Wolfheart, but she dipped her head and responded, “Of course. Lightningfur has control of the camp until me and Flamefur return. Then I will appoint a deputy.”

“What about Cloudpaw, Moonpaw, and Piranhapaw?” Lightningfur asked. “Surely we can’t hand them over to Eaglestar?”

Wolfheart looked at him for a moment with a calm gaze before answering, “No we can’t, but it is up to them to decide where their loyalties lie.”

Moonpaw didn’t detect any sort of hostility or contempt in his new leader’s words, only genuine understanding, as if she knew that whatever the three apprentices chose, they would be loyal to the end. Some cats, however, glanced nervously at Moonpaw and his two siblings as if they expected them to leave that moment for ShadowClan.

“Good luck,” Moonpaw told the medicine cat and leader with a dip of his head before they disappeared silently into thorn barrier.

The black-and-silver apprentice began to feel his thoughts clearing a bit. He quickly grew mad at Breezepaw for not telling him who his father was. She had known for almost a moon that he wanted to find out who his father was, and it was obvious the she had known for some time that it was Eaglestar. The last night they had met was only two nights before the Gathering, and she must have been told by then, if not before.

Moonpaw let his fur rise slightly in his anger before he walked over to the fresh-kill pile and snatched a starling to eat. Most of the other cats were entering their dens and settling down to sleep for the night, but Moonpaw wasn’t tired. He was determined to greet his leader when she came back to the camp. It wasn’t long at all before

the sun had risen and Lightningfur was sending the dawn patrol and some hunting patrols out. He made sure that they would be checking ShadowClan's border for anything suspicious.

Moonpaw continued to lay around until the sun was near setting, thankful that he had not been sent out on any patrol. He hadn't moved once that day, not to eat or stretch his muscles or anything. Until finally, he heard the thorn tunnel shake and the new ThunderClan leader emerged, looking fit to lead the clan in hardships to come.

"Wolfstar," Moonpaw mewed in awe, dipping his head respectfully to his mentor and leader.

The new leader turned to him with a proud gleam in her eye, though underneath he could see that she was still grieving for the old leader. No one even knew what was to become of Oakstar's body.

Would he lie on the island until the next gathering, slowly turning into crow-food? He deserved a much better end, but there was no way a patrol would dare to return to retrieve his body and drag it all the way back for the proper burial. Moonpaw had even heard Badgerface suggest that since his death had caused more than two rules of the Warrior Code to be broken, it was a sign from StarClan that he was not to be buried by their traditions. Until Wolfstar said anything about it, he wasn't going to raise a fuss like the others.

Moonpaw looked up to see Wolfstar on Highledge, shouting, "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey, join beneath Highledge for a clan meeting."

Cats immediately obeyed and walked out of their dens to sit beneath their new leader. Based on the twinkle in most of their eyes, they were sure that Wolfstar would be an excellent leader. It also seemed as though all of them were too worried to bring up the topic of Oakstar's death, or even show their grief.

"The time has come for me to appoint a new deputy," Wolfheart said as Moonpaw sat at the back of the crowd and the cats began murmuring amongst themselves in excitement. "I say

these words before StarClan, so that the spirits of our warrior ancestors may hear and approve of my choice. The new deputy of ThunderClan will be Sunshine!"

Every cat yowled their congratulations to the golden tom, even if some of them were the slightest bit disappointed. Some of them moved to stand and walk away, but Wolfstar had not excused them yet. Instead, her amber gaze wandered over each of the cats in turn, as if trying decide which one of them deserved special praise for something.

"It is also a good time for a new warrior," Wolfstar said at last. "Badgerface, has Wingpaw learned all that you believe he should to join the warriors?"

Badgerface purred and answered, "I have considered him more than ready for the past quarter-moon."

Wolfstar nodded and continued, "I, Wolfstar, leader of ThunderClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. He has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend him to you as a warrior in his turn. Wingpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your clan, even at the cost of your life?"

Wingpaw raised his head high in his pride before answering strongly, "I do."

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Wingpaw, you will now be known as Wingblaze. StarClan honors your perseverance and bravery, and we welcome you as a full warrior of ThunderClan," Wolfstar finished.

The leader stepped forward and put her muzzle on Wingblaze's head, and he responded by giving her a respectful lick on her shoulder. Moonpaw joined in to cheer, "Wingblaze! Wingblaze! Wingblaze!" with the rest of his clan, as everyone's worries were temporarily washed away with the joy of a new warrior.

"Wingblaze will have to hold silent vigil for the night,"

Wolfstar called above the cheers.

“Wolfstar?” Wingblaze’s old mentor, Badgerface, called when the noise had died down.

“What is it Badgerface?”

The she-cat answered, “I wish to retire to the Elders’ den, now that my apprentice has been given his warrior name.”

Some cats let out a *mrrow* of laughter before the leader said, “Badgerface, is it your wish to give up the name of a warrior and join the elders?”

“It is.”

“ThunderClan honors you and all the service you have given to us. I call upon StarClan to give you many moons of rest,” Wolfstar said softly.

Badgerface dipped her head to the leader and retreated to the back of the crowd.

“Anyone else?” Lightningfur called out jokingly.

Wolfstar purred and said, “Let us all rest and prepare for whatever ShadowClan intends to do with us after tomorrow night.”

~

Moonpaw stalked through the forest just behind Wolfstar, Piranhapaw trailing a short distance behind. Fair as the new ThunderClan leader was being, Moonpaw and his siblings were well aware that she was testing their loyalty every chance they got. It was sunhigh on the third day after Eaglestar had granted ThunderClan two days of safety, and Wolfstar and her deputy Sunshine had spent much time with the three half-clan cats. Only Moonpaw, however, knew that not only were they tested more often, but more.

Almost all of their time outside the camp had been near the ShadowClan border, and they hadn’t set paw in camp for more than

a night the entire two days. Wolfstar led the two cats along the ShadowClan border for quite a ways, as if they were on a normal border patrol. But Moonpaw knew better than that. He wasn't surprised when he heard his leader speak halfway down the border.

"Mouse dung, I forgot to get some blackberry leaves," Wolfstar mewed. "Flamefur said that Swiftwind trampled a hornet's nest and got some nasty stings earlier and he wanted me to find some."

"There's a blackberry bush a little ways back. If you want we can help you carry some leaves back," Piranhapaw meowed.

Wolfstar shook her head, "Thank you Piranhapaw, but it'll be fine. Keep an eye out for ShadowClan patrols, and I'll send Brokenheart over immediately to take you the rest of the way."

Moonpaw choked back a growl and said, "Alright, we'll be waiting here."

How could Piranhapaw and Cloudpaw be so oblivious? Clearly Wolfstar was waiting for them to make a break for the enemy territory. Moonpaw understood that she might be cautious of the three apprentices, especially after Mudpaw and Shadepaw had left so abruptly, but Moonpaw and the others had stayed. That must have said something to her. In the very least she could have been more straightforward with them.

But, Moonpaw was willing to wait for a few days. By then he would have either passed her tests…or proved his loyalty in the battle Eaglestar had promised. As he thought about it, if Eaglestar had been true to his word he probably would have sent a patrol or attack force to ThunderClan territory. Suddenly anxious, Moonpaw raised his head and drank in the scents of the forest, scenting for enemy warriors.

ShadowClan!

Moonpaw felt his fur bristle along his spine and he immediately took up a defensive position with his teeth bared and his claws unsheathed. He smelled a fresh ShadowClan scent on ThunderClan territory, though his brother hadn't and was surprised

by his sudden hostility.

"What's wrong?" Piranhapaw hissed in his ear, his storm-blue eyes lit up with fright and his fear-scent tickling Moonpaw's nostrils.

"Nothing," Moonpaw said as he let his fur lie flat. "I thought I smelled ShadowClan, but it's stale. I guess I'm just a little nervous."

"I don't blame you," Piranhapaw visibly shivered beside him, "I don't care what Wolfstar said, I'm scared of ShadowClan and I want to get out of here!"

Moonpaw looked at him and said, "You go ahead and take look to see if Brokenheart is hear yet, I'll stay here and guard the border."

Piranhapaw reluctantly nodded, clearly not eager to leave his brother behind. But, the apprentice left soon enough, sniffing the air for familiar scents. Wolfstar would be trying to watch Moonpaw, but with Piranhapaw out checking for familiar cats she would be scared away, for a short time anyway.

"What are you doing here?" Moonpaw hissed, protecting his borders more than anything.

A black cat slid from the brush and purred; her blue eyes and coal-black fur gleaming in the patches of sunlight that made it to the forest floor. Her tail curled in contentment as she came out to greet Moonpaw. The ThunderClan warrior had thought her to be his friend, but he backed away from her and his tail lashed furiously. His claws were still unsheathed and he had himself partially lowered to the ground, ready to spring.

"This is ThunderClan territory," he said coldly, stopping her dead in her tracks a fox-length away from him.

Breezepaw was clearly hurt by the hostility in his tone. "I waited for you by halfbridge last night, but you never came."

Moonpaw cautiously tasted the air for his mentor to

make sure she wasn't around to hear the ShadowClan apprentice. If Wolfstar found out that he had been meeting Breezepaw secretly for over a moon, she would exile him for sure.

"Why would I meet you," Moonpaw growled after he had decided it was safe to talk for the moment.

"Because we're friends," Breezepaw said as she suddenly padded forward to stand only a mouse-length away from him.

Moonpaw leaped away from her before meowing, "Maybe we were, but you lied to me. You follow a leader who breaks the warrior code as if it were no more than a twig stuck in his path."

"Not anymore."

"What do you mean?" Moonpaw asked as his ears swiveled towards her in interest, though he was still prepared for a fight.

Breezepaw sighed, "Almost as soon as we returned we scared Eaglestar and whoever dared to follow him off of ShadowClan territory. We haven't seen hide or tail of them since."

"What of Mudpaw and Shadepaw?" Moonpaw asked, beginning to wonder if he could trust he r after all.

Breezepaw looked at him with slight anger in her eyes, "Eaglestar and Glareheart fled, and Mudkill and Shadeblood followed. Eaglestar said that by showing their trust and loyalty in joining ShadowClan, they deserved to become warriors."

Moonpaw shivered and sheathed his claws. "But if Glareheart was your deputy, who is leader now?"

"Loyalheart had a dream about the storm at the Gathering, the same night Eaglestar left. The clouds formed into the face of a cat and bolts of lightning formed the cat's whiskers. We've taken it as a sign that Lightningwhisker should be leader, and when she returned from the Moonpool last night she appointed Powerfur as her deputy," Breezepaw explained.

Moonpaw thought about the last time in clan history when a medicine cat had to choose a new leader. Back in the old forest, another ShadowClan cat, Brokenstar, had been exiled by his own Clan, though StarClan still considered him the leader. His successor, Nightstar, still had only one life.

"Then she won't have nine lives?" Moonpaw asked curiously, wondering if the old story was based on reality.

Breezepaw shook her head, "She and Loyalheart claim that she's been given all nine lives. Some of the Clan even says she has already lost a life, though we have no proof of that."

Moonpaw heard a rustling in the bushes. "Go!" he whispered to Breezepaw before he tasted the air for the scent of his clan.

"Please, meet me at halfbridge two nights from now?" she pleaded, her eyes wide with desperation.

Moonpaw thought for a moment, but he quickly answered, "Yes, just go before Wolfstar sees me talking to you!"

Just as the black cat vanished, Brokenheart burst through the trees, panting somewhat. Clearly Wolfstar had sent him anyway when Piranhapaw had forced her back to camp. Then again, she could have been telling the truth when she said that she needed blackberry leaves for Flamefur. Moonpaw quickly shook off the thought.

"I smell ShadowClan!" Brokenheart growled.

Moonpaw pretended to sniff the air before lying, "Really Brokenheart? I haven't sensed any cats around here at all until you showed up. Are you sure your nose isn't playing tricks on you after all that running?"

The warrior sniffed again and let his shoulders fall. "I suppose that could be it. It doesn't smell like there were many, and now the cat seems to have gone."

"Shall we finish the patrol then?" Moonpaw asked, trying

to draw the warrior away before he could question further. After another moment or so, the gray tom turned around and led the way along the border without another word.

As Moonpaw followed closely behind he still found himself questioning whether Breezepaw was telling the truth about Eaglestar. He shivered at the thought of his siblings' warrior names. He half-hoped that she had been lying and that his littermates were still safe within the reaches of the warrior code. He didn't care as much about them, however, as he did his murderous father.

Please StarClan, he found himself praying, *let Eaglestar live the remainder of his life far away from the Clans.*

(Edited to this point. This chapter was cut short because the editing made it too long for one chapter. Please wait to read Chapter 7 or proceed at your own risk. I mean it, it's so confusing it won't even be worth it.)

Chapter Seven

Moonpaw padded into the camp, closely followed by Wolfstar. Two more days had gone by without trouble, though there were some chilly winds that reminded the cats that leaf-bare wasn't far away. Luckily, it was only the beginning of leaf-fall and the prey they caught was even fatter than usual. Moonpaw struggled to carry a mouse and two plump birds all the way back to the camp. He put his catch on the fresh-kill pile and his mentor soon followed.

Despite the tall pile of plump prey, Wolfstar looked worried and distant, making it seem as though she never quite understood what was going on around her. Her loyalty tests had lessened considerably, but even though Moonpaw knew he and his siblings had passed with flying colors, the leader seemed even more worried.

"What's wrong?" Moonpaw finally got the courage to ask her as she just sat next to the fresh-kill pile and gazed into the distance at something he couldn't see.

Wolfstar looked at her apprentice thoughtfully before she answered, "I can't worry you with the Clan's troubles."

"But I'm a Clan cat, I should be included in everything important like any other warrior," Moonpaw pointed out as he sat next to her.

"I'm worried about your father, Eaglestar," she answered calmly. Before Moonpaw could get too confused she continued, "He said we would have two days to give you and your remaining siblings up. It's been days since then and we haven't seen a single hair off his pelt. I can't help but wonder if I should be worried or not."

"I'm sure he won't attack us after all this time," Moonpaw said, not wanting to reveal that Eaglestar had been chased off his territory by his own Clan.

Wolfstar sighed, “What makes you so sure? You’ve seen the way he killed Oakstar because of you. If he was willing to kill a leader at a Gathering, you can bet a couple of mouse tails that he’ll be back. I just wish I knew his angle.”

“Well you can forget about him, for now anyways,” Moonpaw comforted her. “Is anything else bothering you?”

Wolfstar purred, “The Clan is thriving, with numerous kits, apprentices, and warriors. What concerns me is the upcoming leaf-bare. I can’t imagine any way that we can catch enough food to last the leaf-bare without a kit or elder dying. I don’t need to remind you how old Rockstripe is, and Flamefur is starting to show his age.”

Moonpaw looked up at her curiously before saying, “Everything is peaceful in our territory. Kits are playing, the elders lively as they usually are, and the fresh-kill pile practically overflowing, there isn’t any reason to worry right now, is there?”

Wolfstar looked down at him and smiled. “There is much for you to learn Moonpaw. One day you will understand that all of this,” she waved her tail around the clearing, “could disappear at a moment’s notice.”

The leader flicked his shoulder with her gray tail-tip before padding away to her den above Highledge. Her words made him feel uncomfortable as he looked around the clearing. Cowpelt and Daisyfur were watching their kits as they hobbled around the outside of the nursery, still looking too young for such an adventure. Outside the elders’ den, Meadowkit, Warmkit, and Bloomkit were listening eagerly to one of Rockstripe’s thrilling tales, Badgerface dozing off right next to him.

Could it really change just like that? Moonpaw wondered as he looked down at the fresh-kill pile. His appetite had largely disappeared during his conversation with Wolfstar, but he forced himself to take a small vole from the pile and took a few bites until he had finished it. He had just buried the bones when Sunshine, the new deputy, padded over to him.

“Moonpaw, would you mind going to check the WindClan border?” Sunshine asked. “Brokenheart, Critterpaw, and I were going to go by ourselves, but we could use another cat just in case.”

Moonpaw purred, “I would love to.”

Moonpaw was every bit as excited as he sounded. It would be his first patrol without his mentor, unless he counted the time when it was just him and Brokenheart on the ShadowClan border, which he didn’t. No doubt Wolfstar had gone back to watch them from afar. With a jolt he remembered that he would be meeting Breezepaw that very night. He still hadn’t decided if he could trust her or not, but he was willing to see if he still could.

Part of him wanted her to be telling the truth, but largely he wanted her to be lying. If she had lied to him, he could resume his normal life as a ThunderClan apprentice, without visiting an apprentice from an enemy Clan. Most of all, he couldn’t be caught talking to a cat in a Clan that Wolfstar thought he had divided loyalties with.

Sunshine led the patrol silently along the WindClan border. Everything went smoothly, even when they caught scent of a WindClan patrol nearby. Luckily, both patrols were on their own sides of the border and neither one wanted trouble. They simply acknowledge each other with a nod of their heads and moved on. At about sunset they started heading back to the camp after a decent an unimportant patrol.

“What’s that?” Brokenheart asked, sniffing the air curiously.

The other three cats immediately tasted the air, but Moonpaw couldn’t catch much. There was a scent oddly similar to ThunderClan. It wasn’t any cat he knew, but it smelled of the forest and trees. There was also the scent of mud, marsh, fresh air, and kittypet all mingled together in a weird sort of combination.

Sunshine looked startled, “I don’t know what is going on, but clearly a large group of cats passed through here. I remember a

time when I was an apprentice when I smelled cats from the mountain Tribe who had passed through our territory, but I can't quite remember if that's them or not."

"A large group of cats?" Moonpaw echoed in alarm.

"Yes I…" Sunshine stopped abruptly. "They must be attacking the camp!"

"Now why would they do that? It clearly smells of kittypet too, and kittypets wouldn't go and attack our camp for no reason," Brokenheart meowed.

Critterpaw spoke up, "I don't know why, but with such a large group, we should at least hurry back to camp to check it out, shouldn't we?"

Sunshine nodded, "Maybe they aren't attacking, but we have to consider it a possibility. Who knows what kittypets think about all day? Come on and we can see!"

The three cats followed the deputy without hesitation, breaking through the bushes and pelting along through the forest. Sure enough, the scent kept going straight towards the camp without turning even slightly. Whoever was leading the cats obviously knew what they were doing, as if they were going to attack. Moonpaw felt dread prick at his heart as they neared the camp and he saw three strong cats outside the thorn tunnel.

One dark gray tom was entering the tunnel, his fur fluffed up in preparation for the battle. Moonpaw instantly recognized Mudpaw, or Mudkill as he was called now, as he entered the camp with ambition glowing brightly in his green eyes. The two remaining cats, both white and ginger with the weird mud and rock scent stood outside, guarding the tunnel. They both looked up to see the patrol returning and vanished inside the thorn barrier.

Moonpaw instantly knew that his father, Eaglestar, was the leader of these cats. They all raced down into the thorn tunnel, and Moonpaw hoped that what he would find on the other side wouldn't be as terrible as he thought it would be. He was the last to

make it through and froze when he saw the camp.

There were enemy cats all around, almost as many of them as there were ThunderClan cats. Clearly a lot of the cats had been trained to some extent and the muscles underneath their ragged pelts were massive. Most wore kittypet collars, but it was obvious that their origins meant nothing. These cats were vicious and powerful.

Moonpaw looked around wildly and saw that the cats he was with were already charging into the battle with equal ferocity. The apprentice tried to determine where the best place to attack would be. He glanced at the nursery to see Badgerface's black tail disappearing inside, probably going in to protect Rockstripe and the kits. Then Moonpaw looked around the clearing and saw Cloudpaw clawing at a massive brown tom.

Without any hesitation, Moonpaw hurled himself at the tom, bowling him over. They quickly stood again and the tom slashed at Moonpaw's face, leaving a small scratch just below his ear. The ThunderClan apprentices dove at the cat again, biting and clawing, while trying to dodge his swinging paws.

Use your superior speed to avoid your opponent, Moonpaw remembered from his training with Wolfstar. He decided to take her advice and jumped around the enemy warrior, slashing at the base of his tail and biting his hind leg before slipping away. Cloudpaw followed his lead and together they tore at the cat, making him flee from the battle after a short time.

With a howl of anger Moonpaw leapt onto a random cat's back and slashed its shoulder before slipping further into the fight. He just barely caught sight of his father's long black flank before he vanished into the fray. Moonpaw tore after him, but as he leaped over a dead cat, not knowing which side it was from, he felt something crash into him. He flipped around and noticed that he and his opponent were some distance away from the main group.

With a hiss of fury Moonpaw saw not one, but two cats in front of him, and he recognized both. The unmistakable black and dark gray pelts of his brothers stood bristling in front of him, hardly even realizing he was their brother. The growled and spat at him as

the black warrior, Shadeblood, circled around to his other side. Moonpaw was trapped between the two, flicking his gaze to each one repeatedly, and waiting for the attack.

With a howl Mudkill dove at him from one side and Shadeblood jumped from the other, both aiming for his head. *And they're supposed to be warriors?* Moonpaw growled in his thoughts as he slipped beneath their thrashing claws. They gave each other several scratches before managing to stop themselves and turning back to Moonpaw.

"You may have your warrior names, but you are far from being called warriors!" Moonpaw spat as he leaped at Mudpaw, tackling the dark gray tom.

They tumbled and fought, Moonpaw barely noticing as Shadepaw scratched him a couple of times. He fought both cats with every one of his muscles. He felt his hind paws forcing one heavy body away from him, while his teeth and claws gouged at another. He had to blink his eyes rapidly to get rid of the drops of blood that dripped into them. Was it his blood or his enemies'? He had no clue, but he continued to fight like a whole Clan by himself. He gasped as he felt both bodies roll away from him.

Moonpaw was up on his paws again in a moment, watching as Sunshine gave his siblings one last scratch each and they fled away into the forest. He stared after them for what felt like a moon before he turned back to the ThunderClan deputy.

"Thanks," he breathed.

The golden warrior dipped his head in reply and pelted back into the throng of battle. The two white and ginger cats that had been guarding the entrance before tore through the tunnel with howls of pain. Several cats lay dead in the clearing, but Moonpaw didn't have time to focus on them. He jumped back into the fight, hissing and spitting more fiercely than he ever had before. He hardly took the time to distinguish his clanmates from his enemies before clawing at fur.

Moonpaw jumped around through the cats, watching

with some satisfaction as three cats, likely apprentices based on their size, bolted out into the forest, far away from the ThunderClan camp. But the battle raged on. Most of the ThunderClan cats were bleeding quite a bit, and a lot of them limped and showed other signs of pain. Moonpaw saw Twolegheart slip away from the battle and race to Flamefur's den, as fast as his blood-stained paws would let him. Luckily no cat saw him or followed to finish the young warrior.

All of a sudden, Moonpaw felt himself get flattened to the ground by two massive paws. He tried to roll and claw at the ground to escape, but the cat on top of him was far too strong and pinned the apprentice tight to the ground. He could feel the cat's hot breath above his neck and the cat hesitated for a moment.

"I will give you one last chance to join me," Eaglestar hissed in his ear. "I will call you Moondeath, and you can join FireClan to become one of the most powerful cats in the forest." The offer sounded very tempting.

"Alright," Moonpaw growled, the fire of battle glowing in his eyes more fiercely.

Eaglestar purred and Moondeath felt the pressure on his back lessen. He quickly stood and shook the dirt from his fur before looking into Eaglestar's ambitious ice-blue eyes. The tom flicked his tail towards Wolfstar.

"Help your new clan in this battle, and you can be one step closer to ruling the forest at my side," Eaglestar meowed as he lowered himself into a crouching position, as if he were stalking prey.

Moondeath did the same, brushing his father's pelt with his own, and the two cats leaped as one. Eaglestar tackled Wolfstar to the ground and put a paw on her chest roughly, pinning her down. No cat was watching as Moondeath leaped towards the ThunderClan leader. With a roar of blind fury, the new warrior tore at the leader's throat with one swift motion. Eaglestar collapsed on the earth beside Wolfstar, who stared at her apprentice with terror in her eyes.

The battle suddenly stopped as the enemy Clan, FireClan, stopped and looked at their leader. By the time Moonpaw looked down, Eaglestar's neck was oozing with sticky red blood. *The forest will turn crimson with the blood of betrayal, and cats will decide where their loyalties truly lie,* Moonpaw echoed the words from his dream in his head. He watched with the other cats as the long-haired FireClan leader lie still for a while, dying by Moonpaw's own paws. Yet still, he didn't think the prophecy had been fulfilled, if it even was a prophecy.

Has StarClan taken away his remaining lives after he killed Oakstar? Moonpaw wondered, hoping it was true. But, within moments, the black-and-gray tom lifted his almost white head and gazed around at the scene before carefully standing on his paws again. The fur around his neck was red, but the wound had vanished. He continued to look around with a gaze full of hostility, before he stared daggers at Moonpaw.

"You belong with these ThunderClan cats for now," Eaglestar growled out the words as he stepped closer, standing a mouse-length from Moonpaw by the time he had finished. "But I have eight more chances to destroy you and all that you once know. Cherish each moment, because it could very well be your last, Moonkit."

Moonpaw stood tall and gazed up at his father through narrowed eyes, "No *you* watch out, Fox-heart. As long as you are in ThunderClan territory, your eight lives are in as much danger as my one. I will defend my Clan till my dying breath!"

Moonpaw swung at his father, scratching his foreleg. Eaglestar glared at him fiercely, but was clearly too afraid to restart the battle and risk losing another life. He gestured for his warriors to leave and they obeyed, most limping through the thorn tunnel. The leader of FireClan turned around once and looked around the clearing.

"You mark my words. As long as Silverpelt hangs in the sky, I will be preparing to come back. And when I do, I won't stop until every last ThunderClan warrior, apprentice, medicine cat, queen, elder, and kit lays dead at my paws," Eaglestar hissed before

vanishing into the forest.

All of the cats stared after him for several long moments, but Moonpaw soon focused on the cats that lay dead in the clearing. Three ThunderClan cats but only one enemy lay as still as stone, gazing up at StarClan, possibly at their own star bodies. Moonpaw felt his heart break as he stepped up to a pretty gray tabby cat, her amber eye and blue eye wide open to stare blankly at the top of Highledge. Moonpaw rubbed against his mother's cooling fur, cherishing her scent that he might never smell again until he joined her in StarClan.

Moonpaw lifted his head only a little bit to look at the remaining two cats he knew, both apprentices. A brown tabby she-cat with one pay splayed over the body of a silver tom, their eyes closed as they accepted death. Harepaw and Whiskerpaw looked bloodied and torn beyond repair. Gingerpaw padded up to her den mates, her tail twitching in agony as she looked down upon Whiskerpaw's ragged body. She had loved him, many cats knew, and his death would be grieved for many moons to come. Moonpaw glared at the moon, shining brightly above as if nothing had happened that day. He wasn't mad at StarClan, but he hated his father more than words could describe.

"One day," he swore to his father so low that no cat could hear, "when I become a warrior, I will hunt you down and destroy each one of your lives one by one. ThunderClan will be rid of you one day, no matter what it takes."

(This is the end of book one. To read more, go to my profile and continue the story on "Apprentices to Warriors, Peace to Bloodshed"!)

Author's Note

Hello reader's! I am touched by your support and have decided to edit my warriors fanfictions. This book, as I said earlier, is completely edited, WOOT! I will pobably come back later and add some bits and pieces to make it longer a while from now...but that will probably be a LONG time from now! In the meantime, I advise that you check out the sequel: "Warriors: Apprentices to Warriors, Peace to Bloodshed".

I don't have many chapters for book 2 (very few, in fact) and little to none of it has been edited. But, I intend to start editing it IMMEDIATELY, and I hope that you choose to continue reading my warriors fanfiction series. After so many of you were begging me to update, you better read my updates!!!!! Just kidding :3

Good luck, and may StarClan light your path!